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A Companion to

BYZANTINE EPISTOLOGRAPHY

Edited by

ALEXANDER RIEHLE

BRILL

A Companion to Byzantine Epistolography

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Contents

List of Figures and Tables VII
Notes on Contributors X

Introduction: Byzantine Epistolography: a Historical and Historiographical Sketch 1
Alexander Riehle

PART 1
Contexts for Byzantine Epistolography

1 Letter Writing in Antiquity and Early Christianity 33
Thomas Johann Bauer

2 Syriac Epistolography 68
Jack Tannous

3 Letter Collections in the Latin West 92
Lena Wahlgren-Smith

PART 2
Byzantine Letter-Writers in Context

4 Michael Psellos 125
Floris Bernard

5 The Letters of Demetrios Kydones 146
Florin Leonte

PART 3
Forms and Functions of Byzantine Epistolography

6 Epistolography and Rhetoric 177
Sofia Kotzabassi

7 Epistolography and Diplomatics 200
Alexander Beihammer

8 Didacticism in Byzantine Epistolography 227
Florin Leonte

9 Epistolography and Philosophy 255
Divna Manolova

10 Epistolary Culture and Friendship 279
Emmanuel C. Bourbouhakis

11 Epistolary Communication: Rituals and Codes 307
Floris Bernard

12 The Epistolographic Self 333
Stratis Papaioannou

13 The Letter in the *Theatron*: Epistolary Voice, Character, and Soul (and Their Audience) 353
Niels Gaul

14 Letters and Letter Exchange in Byzantine Art 374
Cecily J. Hilsdale

15 Letters in Narrative Literature 403
Carolina Cupane

PART 4
Byzantine Epistolography and (Post-)Modern Theory

16 Letters and Network Analysis 431
Johannes Preiser-Kapeller

17 Letters and New Philology 466
Alexander Riehle

General Bibliography 503
General Index 512
Index of Greek Terms 527
Index of Manuscripts 530
Index of Papyri 531

Figures and Tables

Figures

14.1 Constantine IX Monomachos and Zoe with Christ, south gallery mosaics, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (photo: Cecily J. Hilsdale) 375
14.2 Madrid Skylitzes. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Matritensis Vitr. 26–2, fol. 210r: the widow of the emir of Egypt sends a letter to Michael IV (photo: Biblioteca Nacional de España) 379
14.3 Madrid Skylitzes. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Matritensis Vitr. 26–2, fol. 75v: the exchange of a letter between Theophilos and al Mamun (photo: Biblioteca Nacional de España) 381
14.4 Venice Alexander Romance. Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, Gr. 5, fol. 89r Alexander sends a letter to the wife, mother, and daughter of Darius (photo: Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia) 385
14.5 Venice Alexander Romance. Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, Gr. 5, fol. 89v: the wife, mother, and daughter of Darius send a letter to Alexander; Alexander writes to his mother Olympias (photo: Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia) 386
14.6 Venice Alexander Romance. Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, Gr. 5, fol. 171v: Amazons send their letter to Alexander along with royal gifts (photo: Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia) 389
14.7 Venice Alexander Romance. Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, Gr. 5, fol. 172r: Alexander receives the Amazons' letters and gifts (photo: Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia) 390
14.8 Vatican Epithalamion. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1851, fol. 2v: the arrival of messengers (photo: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana) 394
14.9 Vatican Epithalamion. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1851, fol. 7r: the announcement of the betrothal (photo: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana) 395
14.10 Vatican Epithalamion. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1851, fol. 3v: the arrival of the western princess (photo: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana) 397
16.1 Extraction of the 1-mode-networks of localities, letters and individuals from a 3-mode-network of letters, localities and individuals on the basis of the data in the letter collection of Metropolitan Theophylact of Ochrid (created by J. Preiser-Kapeller, 2013) 441

16.2 Network of localities connected through the letters of Theophylact of Ochrid in geographical space (created by J. Preiser-Kapeller, 2013) 442
16.3 The “ego-network” of Metropolitan Theophylact of Ochrid on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources (created by J. Preiser-Kapeller, 2013) 445
16.4 The “ego-network” of Metropolitan Theophylact of Ochrid on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources after the node of Theophylact has been eliminated from the network (created by J. Preiser-Kapeller, 2013) 446
16.5 The “ego-network” of Theophylact of Ochrid spanned by ties of friendship on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources (created by J. Preiser-Kapeller, 2013) 450
16.6 The “ego-network” of Theophylact of Ochrid spanned by ties of friendship on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources after the node of Theophylact has been eliminated from the network (created by J. Preiser-Kapeller, 2013) 451
16.7 The “ego-network” of Theophylact of Ochrid spanned by ties of support on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources (created by J. Preiser-Kapeller, 2013) 452
16.8 The “ego-network” of Theophylact of Ochrid spanned by ties of support on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources after the node of Theophylact has been eliminated from the network (created by J. Preiser-Kapeller, 2013) 453
16.9 The “ego-network” of Theophylact of Ochrid spanned by relations of enmity on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources (created by J. Preiser-Kapeller, 2013) 454
16.10 The “early ego-network” of Theophylact of Ochrid for the years 1080–1095 created on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources after the node of Theophylact has been eliminated from the network (created by J. Preiser-Kapeller, 2013) 457
16.11 The “late ego-network” of Theophylact of Ochrid for the years 1096–1108 created on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources after the node of Theophylact has been eliminated from the network (created by J. Preiser-Kapeller, 2013) 458
16.12 Three triad types frequent in the various networks 459

Tables

16.1 Extract from the matrix for the network of individuals modeled on the basis of the relational data in Theophylact's letters, with rows and columns for every individual and numbers at the intersections indicating the presence/absence resp. the strength of a link 445
16.2 Basic key figures for the various networks 447
16.3 Three overall structural key figures for the various networks 448
16.4 Top nodes in three centrality measures for the various networks 455
16.5 Triad types more frequent in the various networks than expected for a random network 459

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INTRODUCTION

Byzantine Epistolography: a Historical and Historiographical Sketch

Alexander Riehle

1 Epistolography, or What Is a (Byzantine) Letter?

Faced with the question "What is a letter?", most literate people across the globe today would probably think of a piece of writing, typed or by hand, on a piece of paper – as opposed to e-mail or oral communication – that is dispatched, usually in a sealed envelope, from a sender to a recipient by mail – rather than electronically or passed on directly from the sender to the recipient – in order to convey or solicit some kind of information;[1] and if asked to write a letter, for example, to a friend, family member or professional contact, they would likely resort to more or less standardized formal elements and expressions: a letter head, set phrases such as health wishes and salutations, signature, etc. The letter is thus defined by a matrix of specific material, communicative and formal elements.[2]

This contemporary understanding of the letter conforms with the historical record of the ancient and late antique Mediterranean and beyond.[3] For example, all three of the above criteria apply to Hellenistic, Roman, and late

1 See, for instance, the definitions of "letter" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "A written communication addressed to a person, organization, or other body, *esp.* one sent by post or messenger; an epistle"; and of "Brief" in the German *Duden*, "schriftliche, in einem [verschlossenen] Umschlag übersandte Mitteilung" ("a written message delivered in a [sealed] envelope").

2 For an illustrative example from East Asia see the guidelines in Tatematsu et al., *Writing Letters in Japanese*.

3 See Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, pp. 1–47, who provides an excellent introduction to Greek and Roman letter-writing up to the fourth century AD and to the various problems involved in defining and classifying the diverse material historically subsumed under the umbrella term "letter". See also Petrucci, *Scrivere lettere*, pp. VII–XI, 3–24; Klauck, *Ancient Letters*; Gibson/Morrison, "Introduction: What is a Letter?"; Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek Letter Writing*; Sarri, *Material Aspects of Letter Writing*; and Chapter 1 in this volume. For similar evidence in epistolography of other ancient Mediterranean cultures see, e.g., Michalowski, *Letters from Early Mesopotamia*; Sallaberger, *"Wenn Du mein Bruder bist, …"*; Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*; Hoffner, *Letters from the Hittite Kingdom*; Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*.

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antique/early Byzantine letters that have been preserved in great number in the sands of Egypt. These were written, either by professional scribes or by the senders themselves, on sheets produced from the papyrus plant in order to deliver messages of a private, official or business nature, delivered by a bearer – most often a random person who happened to travel to the letter's place of destination. These letters exhibit a set of standard elements, which include, among other things, a prescript (usually ὁ δεῖνα τῷ δεῖνι χαίρειν: "So-and-so to so-and-so, greetings!"); a prologue expressing a health wish, joy or thanksgiving; concluding exhortations, wishes for the addressee, greetings to other persons and a valediction such as ἔρρωσο ("farewell!"; postscript); recurring set phrases to introduce the different parts of the letter; and conventional motifs pertaining to the exchange of letters and the relationship between writer and addressee.[4]

Unfortunately, no such Byzantine material survives from after the early eighth century, as Greek gradually lost its status as *lingua franca* in Egypt as a result of the Arab conquest of this region.[5] Save for a few imperial missives to foreign authorities,[6] no original Byzantine letters are preserved today. What survives under the rubric "letter"[7] is instead transmitted in manuscript books, most commonly as part of some kind of edited collection. To the individual examples of this rich and diverse material – more than 15,000 Greek letters from the period between 300 and 1500 have come down to us in this form[8] – only one or two elements of our tripartite matrix apply.[9]

A fundamental process of transformation takes place when a letter is transcribed from a piece of support – a tablet or sheet of papyrus, parchment or paper – bearing a written message to a roll or codex where it stands in a dynamic dialogue with other texts included in the same manuscript.[10] While the letter still possesses a materiality in this context, that of the manuscript book, it is a new and quite different one that is not specific to the letter but is shared by a variety of textual genres. Most letters transmitted as part of a collection lack the above-mentioned standardized formal elements at the beginning and

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4 See Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, pp. 34–42; Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 9–42, 188–93; Sarri, *Material Aspects of Letter Writing*, pp. 40–52.

5 On the definition of "Byzantine" in this context, see below, pp. 12–13.

6 See Chapter 7 in this volume.

7 On the Greek terminology, see below, pp. 12–13.

8 See Mullett, "The Classical Tradition", p. 75 ("somewhere around 15,000"); Grünbart, "L'epistolografia", p. 345 ("at least 15,500 by *ca.*250 authors").

9 For general introductions to Byzantine epistolography see Grünbart, "L'epistolografia", Mullett, "Epistolography" and Papaioannou, "Letter-writing". On the various functions of Byzantine letter-writing in particular, see Littlewood, "An 'Ikon of the Soul'".

10 See Chapter 17, pp. 477–90 in this volume.

end – probably because they were considered redundant in the context of a collection and therefore eliminated – and are thus deprived of their most conspicuous epistolary markers.[11] This renders letters often hardly distinguishable from texts traditionally classified as belonging to other genres, and there are even cases when texts change their genre in the world of books: for example, letters transformed into orations and vice versa.[12] Moreover, with the transcription into a book, the letter loses its common status as a private message intended for the addressee's eyes or ears only and assumes a public nature that makes it available to a broader readership.[13]

Other letters contained in books never served the purpose of long-distance interpersonal communication in the first place. Fictional epistolography flourished in the Hellenistic and Imperial periods in the form of collections attributed to historical personages, sometimes assuming the form of epistolary novels; letters of farmers and fishermen; and erotic letters.[14] Although Theophylaktos Simokattes' *Ethical, Rustic and Erotic Letters* (first half of seventh century) are the last representative of this tradition of self-standing fictional letter collections, fictionalized epistolography had a continuing presence in Byzantine literature, as is evidenced, for example, by John Chortasmenos' responses to letters by Libanios and the embedded letters in novelistic literature.[15]

The reasons for this diversified understanding and usage of epistolography are to be sought in its literarization in the late classical and early Hellenistic periods. In the fourth and third centuries BC the letter was adopted and adapted by educated elites, who employed it for various purposes: to impart political advice to rulers (Plato, Isocrates); to defend their deeds (Plato, Demosthenes); to expound philosophical doctrine to students (Epicurus); and, of course, to

11 That these elements continued to be in use in original correspondence is evidenced, for instance, by the elaborate instructions in the late fourteenth-century epistolary manual *Ekthesis nea*, ed. Darrouzès. For strikingly similar evidence from early medieval China for this kind of "de-epistolarization" of letters in the process of publication, see Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, p. 8; for medieval Latin letters see Ysebaert, "Medieval Letters and Letter Collections", pp. 64–65 (= repr., pp. 54–55).

12 See Riehle, *Funktionen der byzantinischen Epistolographie*, pp. 64–65, 274–81. Cf. Gully, *The Culture of Letter-writing*, pp. 38–41 for similar convergences between epistolography and oratory in Arabic literature.

13 On the public-private dichotomy in ancient, Byzantine and early modern letter-writing see Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, pp. 3–4; Allen/Neil, *Crisis Management*, pp. 18–20; Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 16–17; Sarres, *Ἡ βυζαντινή παραμυθητική ἐπιστολή*, pp. 67–72; Henderson, "Humanist Letter Writing"; and Chapter 11, pp. 319–23 in this volume.

14 See Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, pp. 27–33; Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 169–338.

15 For Chortasmenos, see Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 205–06. For letters in novels see Chapter 15, pp. 412–23 in this volume.

deliver messages of more or less private nature, albeit in a more elaborate manner than the everyday letters of common people.[16] This development prompted modern-day scholars – following the programmatic definitions of the New Testament scholar Adolf Deißmann (1866–1937) – to draw a sharp line between "real", private letters (*Brief*) and literary epistles intended for a wider public, with a third group comprising official correspondence. In more recent decades, proliferating work on individual epistolary oeuvres of the Greco-Roman realm has shown how problematic, and ultimately impossible, such a strict distinction is, not only because of the questionable understanding of literature it implies[17] but also because there is simply too much overlap between letters of these different categories to justify neat distinction.[18] Ironically, especially the Pauline Epistles, which provided the incentive for Deißmann's reflections (who considered them "letters"), are an excellent example of the futility of Deißmann's rigid classification.[19] To alleviate the divide, scholars established a fourth main category, that of the "private literary letters" (*literarische Privatbriefe*), which were authored by educated men or more rarely women,[20] of private content but written with an eye to "publication" such as reading in a *literati* gathering or inclusion in a manuscript collection, and therefore not only more sophisticated in style than private correspondence proper but also less generous with specific details (so-called "deconcretization").[21] The lion's share of surviving Byzantine letters would fall into this class.

16 In the Greek realm this last tradition of learned private correspondence is first firmly attested in the fourth century AD (e.g., Emperor Julian, Libanios, and the Cappadocian Fathers), although there must have been earlier versions of such collections which did not survive.

17 See already Sykutris, "Epistolographie", col. 187.

18 See, for instance, the objections presented by Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek Letter Writing*, pp. 7–8.

19 See Doty, "The Classification of Epistolary Literature" and Chapter 1, pp. 33–34 in this volume.

20 Only one Byzantine collection comprising letters authored by a woman has come down to us: the correspondence between the aristocrat Eirene Choumnaina Palaiologina (d. *ca.*1354/55) and an anonymous monk (probably Gregory Akindynos): Eirene Choumnaina, *Correspondence with an Anonymous Monk*, ed. and trans. Hero. The evidence of surviving letters addressed to women (see Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 197, n. 139 and, for example, Kazhdan/Talbot, "Women and Iconoclasm", pp. 396–400 and 408) suggests that this lacuna is the result of transmission rather than lack of authorial agency.

21 See Sykutris, "Epistolographie", cols. 196–200; Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 206–07; see also Doty, "The Classification of Epistolary Literature", pp. 192–99 for a gradual model.

Beside these questions of classification, the very status of the letter within textual history has been debated. Is it a genre? Or rather a form? A mode?[22] If we understand genres as groups of texts in a culturally and chronologically delimited space, which are perceived by authors and public of that culture as cohesive and therefore provide an interpretative framework for their contemporary audience – rather than as immutable *Naturformen* or as a classification system and heuristic-hermeneutical tool created by modern-day scholars – we can well accord the Byzantine ἐπιστολή the status of a genre, in my opinion. A corpus of texts that by their authors or contemporaries are attributed to a given genre – e.g., in headings, glosses or commentaries, or through inclusion in a collection – can therefore serve as starting material for the description of this genre. This text corpus can be analyzed in terms of shared and divergent textual structures and functions.[23] On this basis, texts that survive under a different generic label, or without one, but which reveal similarities with the texts of our corpus, can be considered as part of the genre. This is, for instance, the case with the considerable number of hitherto unacknowledged Byzantine verse letters or epistolary poems.[24] Genres, of course, always have fuzzy edges, and explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious hybridity is inherently inscribed in any genre system.[25] Depending on specific type, i.e., function or occasion,

22 See Mullett, "The Madness of Genre", pp. 235–37 and ead., *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 20–23. Mullett, who draws on Altman's influential *Epistolarity*, classifies the letter as a form rather than as a genre, with epistolary genres being the recommendatory letter, the propemptic letter, the *consolatio*, etc. While Mullett's approach is certainly stringent and makes sense from a modern perspective – and I agree with her fundamental assumption that a genre emerges where form and "type" (occasion, function) meet – I do not think that Byzantine theoreticians would have placed ἐπιστολή and λόγος ("discourse", "speech") on the same conceptual level. While the ἐπιστολή is confined by a limited range of contents and occasions (see below, pp. 7–11 on ancient and medieval epistolary theory), a λόγος is characterized by virtually infinite flexibility in form and function: it can be a "secular" encomium conceived for performance, a hagiographical homily, an imperial document (χρυσόβουλλος λόγος), a philosophical or scientific treatise; even poems are classified as λόγοι in Byzantium (see Bernard, *Writing and Reading*, pp. 31–57). The λόγος ἐπιστολιμαῖος ("epistolary discourse, speech"; see below, p. 11 at n. 54) proves the point.

23 For such an understanding of genres see in particular Jauß, "Theorie der Gattungen", esp. pp. 110–18 (= "Theories of Genres", pp. 79–87), and, for application to Byzantine literature, Mullett, "The Madness of Genre" and Agapitos, "Genre, Structure and Poetics"; for a similar approach to defining ancient and late antique letters, see Gibson/Morrison, "Introduction: What is a Letter?", pp. 9–16.

24 See the forthcoming anthology with essays in Riehle/Kubina, *Greek Epistolary Poetry*.

25 See, for instance, Agapitos, "Ancient Models and Novel Mixtures" and in general Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 181–90.

a text can therefore be a letter *and* something else at the same time.[26] Several chapters in the section *Forms and Functions of Byzantine Epistolography* in this volume explore exactly such connections and interpenetrations with other, not specifically epistolary, genres, types and modes.[27]

With this historical, rather than historiographical, understanding of genres in mind, it is perhaps best to begin with a look at how the Byzantines themselves defined and understood letter-writing. The composite term "epistolography" is a modern invention,[28] which combines two Greek words that are used already in antiquity to designate oral and written communication.[29] The noun ἐπιστολή – a derivative of the verb ἐπιστέλλω ("to send, dispatch, command") – indicates the function and content, rather than the form, of a communication in early classical times: originally some kind of order and, by extension, any message, be it oral or written. It is only in the course of the fourth century BC that ἐπιστολή is exclusively used for written communication and that it becomes the generic name for "letter". In the process, new derivative adjectives (ἐπιστολικός, ἐπιστολιμαῖος, ἐπισταλτικός: "epistolary"), diminutives (ἐπιστόλιον, ἐπιστολίδιον) and composite nouns (e.g., ἐπιστολιαφόρος: "letter-bearer"; ἐπιστολογράφος: "letter-writer") are created. This consolidation of terminology goes hand in hand with the emergence of the structural-formal epistolary markers mentioned above. This evidence suggests that the ἐπιστολή developed into a distinct genre during the late classical period.

Nouns derived from the verb γράφω ("to draw, write") constitute the second major group of terms for "letter", thus distinguishing written from oral communication: most commonly γράμματα (literally "written characters, letters") and less often its singular γράμμα, the diminutive γραμμάτιον or γραφή ("piece of writing"). Although these terms are frequently used in correspondence and generated the common derivative γραμματο-/γραμματηφόρος ("letter-bearer"), they never appear, to my knowledge, as a genre name in headings of collections and only exceptionally, in the singular γράμμα, in lemmata of individual

26 On this issue see also Papaioannou's introduction to his edition of Michael Psellos' *Letters*, pp. xliv–li.

27 See particularly Chapters 6–9, 15 and 17.

28 The term is first attested in early modern Latin as *epistolographia*, which in turn appears to be based on the rare post-classical Greek noun ἐπιστολογράφος (see Liddell/Scott/Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 661) or rather its equally rare medieval Latin equivalent *epistolographus* = "letter-writer, secretary"; see Du Cange et al., *Glossarium*, vol. 3, p. 280: <http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr/EPISTOLOGRAPHUS>.

29 The following remarks on terminology are mainly based on Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek Letter Writing*, pp. 13–19 and Sarri, *Material Aspects of Letter Writing*, pp. 16–24. For interesting parallels in Arabic and Chinese epistolary terminology see Gully, *The Culture of Letter-writing*, pp. 2–5 and Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, pp. 34–36.

letters. Other terms in antiquity – mostly in the early phase of the history of Greek epistolography, before the more specific terms ἐπιστολή and γράμματα prevailed – are metonymically borrowed from the writing support used: βυβλίον / βιβλίον ("piece of papyrus"), which in the Roman period is replaced by the synonymous χάρτης / χαρτίον; μολύβδιον ("piece of lead"); πίναξ ("wooden table, writing tablet"); δέλτος / δελτίον ("writing tablet"); ὄστρακον ("potsherd").

The Byzantine usage builds on this classical and Hellenistic terminology:[30] by the late antique period, ἐπιστολή is firmly established as generic name, while γράμματα continues to be used as a synonym, although it had a broader semantic field and its meaning could therefore be ambivalent. (The plural does not help either: the modern reader in particular, lacking context, often has to guess whether a writer refers to one or several pieces of correspondence.) With the exception of the vernacular χαρτί(ν) or χαρτίτσι (from χάρτης: "piece of papyrus", see above, or later "paper", hence "document"), ancient terms derived from the writing support were gradually abandoned, while new names emerged either as synonyms for ἐπιστολή / γράμματα or to designate specific epistolary types or subgenres. For example, συλλαβή / συλλαβαί (literally "syllable(s)") and πιττάκι(ον) fall into the first category. The latter originally designated a writing tablet and in the middle Byzantine period especially imperial and patriarchal documents, and would become a standard term for letter in vernacular Greek. In the second category of terms signifying particular epistolary types belong, for instance, ἀντίγραμμα or ἀντίγραφον for a letter-response; ἀναφορά ("report") for a petition to an emperor; and σάκρα – derived from Latin *sacra* – for an official letter issued by the emperor or an ecclesiastical authority, which from the Greek found its way also into Syriac, as did τόμος (originally "papyrus roll", "book") for a synodical letter and ἐγκύκλιος for an encyclical.[31]

Epistolary theorists and letter-writers described and defined the ἐπιστολή (henceforth "letter") using both formal and functional criteria. In functional terms, the letter is a medium of communication, "the one half of a dialogue" as the editor of Aristotle's letters, Artemon, is famously said to have phrased it.[32] However, unlike the dialogue, which "imitates spontaneous speech", the letter is "committed to writing and in a way sent as a gift".[33] A popular late antique manual of letter-writing gives the following succinct definition: "A letter is a

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30 See Tomadakes, *Βυζαντινὴ ἐπιστολογραφία*, pp. 27–38 for an extensive list of Byzantine terms for letters; for imperial and patriarchal letters see also Chapter 7, pp. 203–09 in this volume.

31 See Chapter 2, p. 71 with n. 16 in this volume.

32 Demetrios, *On Style* 223, ed. and trans. Chiron, p. 63, l. 5–6 (trans. Malherbe, p. 17): εἶναι γὰρ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν οἷον τὸ ἕτερον μέρος τοῦ διαλόγου.

33 Ibid., 224, ed. and trans. Chiron, p. 63, l. 3–4 (trans. Malherbe, p. 17; modified): ὁ μὲν γὰρ μιμεῖται αὐτοσχεδιάζοντα, ἡ δὲ γράφεται καὶ δῶρον πέμπεται τρόπον τινά.

kind of written conversation of someone absent with another absent person and fulfills a practical purpose."[34] Pivotal to this definition of the fundamentally communicative function of epistolography is the spatial separation between two or more people, a situation from which emerged a series of epistolary motifs and set phrases such as presence in absence, the *unio mystica*, the letter as *alter ego*, etc. The letter can help overcome or at least cope with separation, but also draws attention to this separation, thus potentially enforcing the feeling of loneliness.[35] Friendship naturally looms large in this context, although the Byzantines were well aware that epistolary *philia* is essentially instrumental:

> The friendly type [of letter], then, is one that seems to be written by a friend to a friend. But it is by no means [only] friends who write [in this manner]. For frequently those in prominent positions are expected by some to write in a friendly manner to their inferiors and to others who are their equals, for example, to military commanders, viceroys, and governors. There are times, indeed, when they write to them without knowing them [personally]. They do so, not because they are close friends and have [only] one choice [of how to write], but because they think that nobody will refuse them when they write in a friendly manner, but will rather submit and heed what they are writing. Nevertheless, this type of letter is called friendly as though it were written to a friend.[36]

As a reciprocal medium of communication which served social and pragmatic needs, letter-exchange was closely related to gift-giving. The letter itself was considered a gift[37] and was regularly accompanied by presents such as foodstuff, textiles, books or devotional objects. Although a material object understood primarily as a piece of writing, the letter had also an oral/aural di-

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34 Pseudo-Libanios/Pseudo-Proklos, *Epistolary Styles*, ed. Foerster, p. 27, l. 8–10 = ed. Weichert, p. 14, l. 1–2 (trans. Malherbe, p. 67; modified): Ἐπιστολὴ μὲν οὖν ἐστιν ὁμιλία τις ἐγγράμματος ἀπόντος πρὸς ἀπόντα γινομένη καὶ χρειώδη σκοπὸν ἐκπληροῦσα.

35 See Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 13–16 for a few characteristic examples from early and middle Byzantine letter-writers.

36 Pseudo-Demetrios, *Epistolary Types*, ed. Weichert, p. 2, l. 19–p. 3, l. 5 (trans. Malherbe, p. 33): Ὁ μὲν οὖν φιλικός ἐστιν ὁ δοκῶν ὑπὸ φίλου γράφεσθαι πρὸς φίλον. γράφουσι δὲ οὐχ οἱ πάντως φίλοι. πολλάκις γὰρ ἐν ὑπάρχοις κείμενοι πρὸς ὑποδεεστέρους ὑπό τινων ἀξιοῦνται φιλικὰ γράψαι καὶ πρὸς ἄλλους ἴσους, στρατηγούς, ἐπιστρατήγους, διοικητάς. ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ προσγράφουσι τούτους ἀγνοοῦντες. οὐ γὰρ διὰ τὸ συγκεκρᾶσθαι καὶ μίαν ἔχειν αἵρεσιν τοῦτο πράττουσιν, ἀλλ’ οὐδένα νομίζοντες ἀντερεῖν αὐτοῖς φιλικὰ γράφουσιν, <ἀλλ’> ὑπομενεῖν καὶ ποιήσειν περὶ ὧν γράφουσιν. ὁ μέντοι τύπος καλεῖται τῆς ἐπιστολῆς φιλικὸς ὡς πρὸς φίλον γραφόμενος. For discussion see Chapter 10, pp. 284–85 in this volume.

37 See above, p. 7 at n. 33 and Bernard, "'Greet me with Words'".

mension. Regularly, oral messages delivered by the bearer supplemented the written text. More importantly, the written letter also possessed an inherent orality. As letters were commonly regarded as true likenesses of their writer,[38] the written characters, which would be recited upon delivery rather than silently read by their recipient, functioned as a representation of the author's character and voice just like an image represented the person depicted.[39]

In terms of formal features, theorists generally advise that a letter should be relatively short, in a plain but graceful style – which included, for example, literary quotations, proverbial phrases and the moderate use of playful elements such as gibes and riddles – and clear in diction and syntax.[40] However, since the letter is a utilitarian genre (*Gebrauchsliteratur*)[41] that in practice can serve a multitude of functions, cover a wide range of topics and be addressed to people of different social standing, the epistolary form is characterized by great variance,[42] and so a letter's style had to be adapted to each particular occasion.[43] Although brevity was a virtue, the length of a letter was to be determined by its specific purpose (χρεία);[44] and letters addressed to people of

38 See Demetrios, *On Style* 227, ed. and trans. Chiron, p. 64, l. 1–5 (trans. Malherbe, p. 19; modified): "The letter, like the dialogue, should abound in character. It may be said that every author writes [or draws] his letter almost like an image of his soul. In every other kind of composition it is possible to discern the writer's character, but none so clearly as in the epistolary" (Πλεῖστον δὲ ἐχέτω τὸ ἠθικὸν ἡ ἐπιστολή, ὥσπερ καὶ ὁ διάλογος· σχεδὸν γὰρ εἰκόνα ἕκαστος τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς γράφει τὴν ἐπιστολήν. καὶ ἔστι μὲν καὶ ἐξ ἄλλου λόγου παντὸς ἰδεῖν τὸ ἦθος τοῦ γράφοντος, ἐξ οὐδενὸς δὲ οὕτως ὡς ἐπιστολῆς).

39 See Riehle, "Epistolary Voices".

40 See the passages compiled and paraphrased in Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, pp. 13–14 and Sykutris, "Epistolographie", cols. 193–95. For the later Byzantine period see especially Pseudo-Gregory of Corinth, *On the Four Parts of the Perfect Speech*, ed. Hörandner, p. 106, l. 111–22 (trans. at p. 111). See also Prieto Domínguez, "La preceptiva epistolar en Bizancio".

41 For this concept see Belke, *Literarische Gebrauchsformen* (discussion of letters at pp. 142–57) and Garzya, "Testi letterari d'uso strumentale" for application to Byzantine literature (discussion of letters at pp. 269–71).

42 Pseudo-Demetrios, *Epistolary Types*, ed. Weichert, p. 1, l. 2–3 (trans. Malherbe, p. 31; modified): "Epistolary types are considered to consist of a great number of forms" (Τῶν ἐπιστολικῶν τύπων ... ἐχόντων τὴν θεωρίαν τοῦ συνεστάναι μὲν ἀπὸ πλειόνων εἰδῶν); Pseudo-Libanios/Pseudo-Proklos, *Epistolary Styles*, ed. Foerster, p. 27, l. 2–3 = ed. Weichert, p. 13, l. 2–3 (trans. Mahlerbe, p. 67; modified): "The epistolary style is varied and manifold" (Ὁ μὲν ἐπισταλτικὸς χαρακτὴρ ποικίλος τε καὶ πολυσχιδὴς ὑπάρχει).

43 Pseudo-Demetrios, *Epistolary Types*, ed. Weichert, p. 1, l. 3–4 (trans. Malherbe, p. 31; modified): "[Epistolary types are considered to be] produced [?] from those [forms] always fitting the occasion at hand" (ἀναβάλλεσθαι [ἀναλαμβάνεσθαι? Cf. Weichert's apparatus] δὲ ἐκ τῶν ἀεὶ πρὸς τὸ παρὸν ἁρμοζόντων).

44 Gregory of Nazianzos, *Letters*, no. 51.2, ed. and trans. Gallay, vol. 1, p. 66: "What determines the length of letters is its purpose" (Ἔστι δὲ μέτρον τῶν ἐπιστολῶν, ἡ χρεία);

high rank could employ a more elevated style than that envisioned for more mundane contexts.[45] In order to find and practice the appropriate form for each occasion, theorists and teachers advised aspiring letter-writers to study and imitate the style of canonical authors, especially of late antiquity. In the ninth century, Photios included a brief discussion of Basil of Caesarea's letters in his monumental work of literary criticism known as *Bibliotheca*, recommending that one should "take them as a guideline for the epistolary style",[46] and named in a letter to Amphilochios the letters attributed to Phalaris and Brutus as well as those of Libanios, Julian, "the sweet Basil" (Βασίλειος ὁ γλυκύς), "Gregory, who more than anyone is a creator of beauty" (ὁ κάλλους εἴ τις ἄλλος ἐργάτης Γρηγόριος) and Isidore of Pelousion as useful readings for epistolary composition.[47] The late twelfth- or thirteenth-century treatise *On the Four Parts of the Perfect Speech* names as models (ἀρχέτυπα) the three Cappadocian Fathers, Synesios, Libanios and Michael Psellos.[48] This passage was integrated in the early fourteenth-century into Joseph Rhakendytes' *Synopsis of Rhetoric*.[49] Studies have shown that these instructions on imitation were by and large heeded by the practitioners of the art who often explicitly or implicitly draw on the letters of the great letter-writers of the past, either by quoting and alluding to specific passages from them, or by generally imitating their style and rhetorical structure.[50] An extreme case are the "mashup letters" of James the

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Pseudo-Libanios/Pseudo-Proklos, *Epistolary Styles* 50, ed. Foerster, p. 34, l. 17–p. 35, l. 4 = ed. Weichert, p. 20, l. 14–p. 21, l. 1 (trans. Mahlerbe, p. 73): "The length of the letter must be determined by its subject matter, and in no way should fullness of treatment be regarded as a fault. It is, indeed, occasionally necessary to draw out certain letters as need demands" (τὸ μὲν οὖν μέγεθος τῆς ἐπιστολῆς ὡς πρὸς τὰ πράγματα, καὶ οὐ πάντως τὸ πλῆθος καθάπερ κακίαν ἀτιμάζειν καλόν, ἀλλὰ δεῖ καί τινας ἐπιστολὰς ἀπομηκύνειν ἐν καιρῷ πρὸς τὴν ἀπαιτοῦσαν χρείαν).

45 Demetrios, *On Style* 234, ed. and trans. Chiron, p. 66, l. 1–3 (trans. Malherbe, p. 19; modified): "Since occasionally we write to cities and kings, such letters must be composed in a slightly heightened tone. For one must pay regard to the person to whom the letter is addressed" (Ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ πόλεσίν ποτε καὶ βασιλεῦσι γράφομεν, ἔστωσαν τοιαῦται [αἱ] ἐπιστολαὶ μικρὸν ἐξηρμέναι πως. στοχαστέον γὰρ καὶ τοῦ προσώπου ᾧ γράφεται). See Tinnefeld, "Kriterien und Varianten des Stils" for a pertinent case study on the letters of Demetrios Kydones.

46 Photios, *Bibliotheca* 143, ed. Henry, vol. 2, pp. 109–10: κανόνα λαβεῖν … ἐπιστολιμαίου χαρακτῆρος.

47 Photios, *Letters*, no. 207, ed. Westerink/Laourdas, vol. 2, pp. 106–07.

48 Pseudo-Gregory of Corinth, *On the Four Parts of the Perfect Speech*, ed. Hörandner, p. 106, l. 120–22 (trans. at p. 111). On the date of the treatise see ibid., p. 117.

49 Joseph Rhakendytes, *Synopsis of Rhetoric*, ed. Walz, pp. 558–59. See also the letter of Joseph Bryennios quoted and discussed in Chapter 17, pp. 478–79 of this volume.

50 See, for instance, Fatouros, "Die Abhängigkeit des Theodoros Studites"; Grünbart, "Beobachtungen zur byzantinischen Briefrhetorik"; Kolovou, "Auf der Suche nach einer Theorie des Zitats"; and Chapter 6, pp. 190–91 in this volume.

Monk in the mid-twelfth century, which incorporate several hundred whole passages and snippets from letters of the church fathers, particularly Basil.[51]

Although a great deal of texts that survive under the label ἐπιστολή conform with these functional and formal parameters, others defy the definitions outlined above. This troubled already ancient theorists. Demetrios thus complained that some so-called "letters" are actually treatises (συγγράμματα) with the word "Greetings" (χαίρειν) attached at the beginning, while he considered it equally inopportune to employ the periodic style of forensic oratory. In addition to the criteria of length, diction and syntax, Demetrios insists that not every subject matter (πρᾶγμα) is suited for the letter, and mentions specifically sophistical debates (σοφίσματα) and inquiries into natural history (φυσιολογίας) as inappropriate.[52] These deliberations show that the label ἐπιστολή could in practice accommodate a wider range of styles and topics than contemporary theory – which attempted to distinguish the letter from other genres by establishing boundaries – wished to concede, and the surviving record for Byzantium confirms that the letter continued to serve as an *Einkleidungsform* especially for religious, political and scientific instruction.[53] In order to avoid violating the norms of letter-writing – which is a permanent concern in Byzantine correspondence – writers resorted to often explicit hybridity and invented a new composite term to accommodate in letters elements considered to exceed the limits of epistolography such as length and discursive character: λόγος ἐπιστολιμαῖος ("epistolary discourse, speech").[54]

The present volume builds on the premises outlined above. It discusses examples from the vast corpus of Byzantine texts that are classified in the historical record as ἐπιστολαί and other texts that share similarities with these "letters"; the various different forms they could assume and purposes they

51 James the Monk, *Letters*, eds. Jeffreys/Jeffreys; see the *Index fontium* at pp. 219–29.

52 Demetrios, *On Style* 228–31 and 234, ed. and trans. Chiron, pp. 64–66 (trans. Malherbe, p. 19).

53 For antiquity see Sykutris, "Epistolographie", cols. 200–07; for late antiquity see Allen/Neil, *Crisis Management*, pp. 21–23; for Byzantium see Chapter 8 in this volume and, for example, Symeon the New Theologian, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Turner, pp. 10–24 and Riehle, "Epistolographie und Astronomie", pp. 243–44.

54 Two examples from the late Byzantine period: John Chortasmenos' *Epistolary Speech* (ed. Hunger) is addressed to one person only and employs friendship imagery typical of Byzantine letters, but also includes an extensive biographical encomium of a deceased person followed by a *consolatio*, both of which closely follow Menander Rhetor's guidelines; Michael Apostoles' *Epistolary Speech, or On Justice* (*Letters*, no. 125, ed. Stefec, pp. 136–45) is essentially a combined petitionary letter (ἀναφορά) and forensic discourse accusing the titular Patriarch of Constantinople, Girolamo Lando, of defaulting on Apostoles' and his peers' annual salaries. This text Apostoles addressed and dispatched from the island of Crete to the Signoria of Venice.

could serve; their theorizations and representations; and their uses by historical and literary scholarship. While this brief introductory essay works under the assumption of a more or less solid genre of Byzantine epistolography, a much-needed monographic treatment will likely come to the conclusion that the genre underwent significant changes in the course of Byzantium's millennial history – which brings us to the next issue.

The field of Byzantine Studies has been vexed by the issue that "Byzantium" does not exist as a historical entity. For the "Byzantines", who considered and called themselves Romans, there existed no Byzantine Empire, but only the Roman Empire, which came to end when the Ottomans conquered the "New Rome" Constantinople in 1453. The endpoint is thus clear. But where and when are its beginnings? Various historical turning points have been suggested: the reign of Constantine I (sole emperor 324–337) which saw the foundation of the empire's soon-to-be capital Constantinople and the firm establishment of Christianity as an officially recognized and promoted religion; the late fourth century, when pagan cultic practices were prohibited by law and the empire was split into an Eastern and a Western domain between the heirs of Theodosios I; the mid-sixth century, when under Justinian I the empire witnessed an expansionist revival and the last pagan institution – the Neoplatonic Academy of Athens – closed its doors; and the rise of Islam and subsequent Arab expansion in the seventh century, which threw the empire into a severe political and economic crisis, thus triggering a process of massive administrative and social transformations. While classicists and self-professed late antiquists since the groundbreaking work of Peter Brown in the 1970s tend to consider these centuries as belonging to a "long late antiquity",[55] Byzantinists have tried to reclaim this period for themselves.[56] This is not the place to give an account of the respective arguments in favor of each position, let alone contribute to the still ongoing debate. Suffice it to say that although there are good reasons to have a volume on Byzantine culture begin in the fourth century, the early centuries are not systematically covered in this companion, though several contributors do sporadically discuss authors and practices of the fourth through seventh centuries. This exclusion should not be understood as a statement vis-à-vis the question of the beginning of Byzantine literature.[57] On the contrary, our genre shows how closely this period and the later centuries belong together, as it

55 From the mass of pertinent literature see, for instance, Cameron, "The 'Long' Late Antiquity" and Marcone, "A Long Late Antiquity?".

56 See, for example, Lilie, "Besprechung von Schreiner, *Byzanz 565–1453*", pp. 852–53 and the reference in n. 57 below.

57 On this issue see Agapitos, "Late Antique or Early Byzantine?".

was then that the typical "Byzantine letter took on its definitive form".[58] The reason is rather a pragmatic one: while for late antiquity, or early Byzantium, there is a plethora of excellent recent work on specific topics and individual authors,[59] such groundwork is for the most part still lacking with respect to the enormously rich epistolary culture of the middle and late Byzantine periods.

Between the classicizing epistolographers of the fourth through the first half of the sixth century and the revival of traditional forms of letter-writing at the turn from the eighth to the ninth century the relatively scant epistolary material that has survived usually takes the form of theological treatises. This is, for instance, the case with the letters of Maximos Homologetes[60] – which nevertheless exhibit clear awareness of traditional epistolary conventions of learned private correspondence – or the synodal and encyclical letters that are transmitted as part of the acts of church councils.[61] It is only towards the end of iconoclastic period that epistolography, along with several other genres, including historical narrative and epigrammatic poetry, experienced a forceful renewal.[62] This is evidenced not only in the compilation of major letter-collections of authors of that period – beginning with Theodore the Studite and Ignatios the Deacon[63] – but also in an increasing interest in the epistolary oeuvres of authors of the past, especially of late antiquity, such as the Church Fathers of the fourth century, Libanios, Synesios and Isidore of Pelousion. This establishment of a canon of epistolary classics in the middle Byzantine period

58 Mullett, "The Classical Tradition", p. 85. In her excellent concise survey of the developments of Byzantine epistolography throughout the centuries (ibid., pp. 85–89), which has yet to be replaced by a much-needed monograph on the subject, Mullett focuses, in my view, too narrowly on the mass of learned (most commonly friendship) letters preserved in collections (i.e., Sykutris' and Hunger's *literarische Privatbriefe*; see above p. 4 at n. 21), while excluding, among others, letters embedded in fictional and non-fictional narratives, theological (e.g., encyclical) letters, and treatises framed as letters which she does mention for the Roman period (ibid., p. 84). The same applies to the overview in Grünbart, "L'epistolografia", pp. 346–52.

59 See, most recently, Sogno/Storin/Watts, *Late Antique Letter Collections*; Neil/Allen, *Collecting Early Christian Letters*; Lenski, "Special Issue: Letters in Late Antiquity"; and the handbook chapter Sogno/Watts, "Epistolography".

60 See the comprehensive overview of Maximos' oeuvre in Jankowiak/Booth, "A New Date-List".

61 See the survey in Brubaker/Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, pp. 276–80, as well as pp. 233–40 on the acts of councils. The bulk of letters and letter-collections listed here date from the revival period, however. For similar material from the fifth and sixth centuries see the survey of Greek authors of episcopal letters in Allen/Neil, *Crisis Management*, esp. pp. 205–13.

62 Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650–850)*, esp. pp. 384–90, p. 390 on epistolography.

63 See ibid., pp. 247–54 and 348–52.

is witnessed by their dissemination in manuscripts in the form of complete corpora of one or more authors or in some kind of miscellany, where they are sometimes paired with more recent epistolographers;[64] in grammatical-lexical and geographical-historical commentaries on them;[65] their appearance as models in critical discourse; and their imitation by contemporary writers.[66] It is also in this period that poetry attains such an important place in the school curriculum and performative practice that letters are increasingly couched in verse.[67] All these trends continue into the later centuries, when the letter also found its way into the revived genre of the novel and into illustrated manuscripts of various genres.[68] Although Byzantine epistolary traditions continued well into the post-Byzantine period in both Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire,[69] the volume takes the fall of Constantinople in 1453 as its endpoint.

In terms of geographical distribution, it is noticeable that surviving Greek letter-collections of late antiquity span the entire Eastern Mediterranean: almost all major author-collections of the fourth-sixth centuries are by men who spent most of their lives in cities of North Africa, Palestine, Syria or Asia Minor. With the loss of these territories to Muslim rulers in the seventh century and the concomitant de-urbanization of Byzantium's remaining Eastern territories, Constantinople increasingly became the sole center of literary production.[70] The vast majority of surviving Byzantine letters was therefore written by authors who resided in the capital or were at least closely tied to the imperial court and Constantinopolitan elites. Only during the final century of Byzantium's existence Greek epistolary collections become more geographically diversified again – a result of the fragmentation of the empire and the emigration of intellectuals into regions not under Byzantine rule.[71]

A final remark in this preliminary sketch of Byzantine epistolography regards language. As it will have become clear by now, letters of the Byzantine period and realm, as defined in the previous paragraphs, are almost exclusively written in Greek. Latin never asserted itself in the Eastern parts of the Roman

64 For a few early examples of this last type see Chapter 17, p. 486 at n. 89–91 in this volume.
65 See, for example, the scholia on Synesios' letters in Garzya, "Scolî inediti" and id., "Nuovi scolî".
66 See above p. 10 with n. 50.
67 See above p. 5, n. 24.
68 For letters in novels see Chapter 15, pp. 412–23 and for illustrated manuscripts Chapter 14 in this volume.
69 See the final section in Riehle, "Epistolography, Social Exchange".
70 On the decline of secular literature in the seventh century as a result of the disappearance of late antique municipal society see Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, pp. 425–35.
71 See Riehle, "Epistolography, Social Exchange".

Empire outside of the central bureaucratic apparatus, and even these imperial institutions were gradually Hellenized in the course of late antiquity, a process that was completed in the early seventh century.[72] As a result of this development, we usually equate Byzantine with Medieval Greek literature. Letter-writing is of course no exception, and so almost all examples of epistolary literature discussed in this volume, save for the first three chapters, are in Greek.

2 The Historiography of Byzantine Epistolography

The following does not aim to provide an exhaustive survey and discussion of previous scholarship on Byzantine epistolography – which would require considerably more room than is available for such an introductory chapter – but merely intends to outline some general trends in approaches to medieval Greek letter-writing. A good starting point for such an endeavor is Peter Hatlie's "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", which ingeniously summarized and evaluated the state of the art in the 1990s and formulated thoughts on the way forward.

Perhaps the most significant development, and best news, since the publication of Hatlie's article is that Byzantine epistolography today seems to be in little need of redemption. The bad press it got in much scholarship of the twentieth century has given way to a multitude of different approaches to letters as valuable historical sources and as a literary genre in which the Byzantines excelled. This shift was prompted by a general turn away from two major interpretive trends that dominated Byzantine Studies in its first century of existence as an institutionalized academic discipline: historical positivism and romantic literary criticism. While scholars of the former school attempted to extract factual details from elusive rhetorical genres,[73] literary critics in the romantic tradition assessed the Byzantine literary heritage under the assumption that originality and individuality are the only merits of literature.[74] Both trends had led to a

72 See Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, pp. 403–04.

73 In his controversial 1975 lecture-essay *Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror*, Cyril Mango stated characteristically in reference to the tenth-century treatise *De thematibus* (pp. 15–16): "The difficulties which the historian has to overcome in dealing with a text like the *De thematibus* are all too obvious: he has to sift out all the antiquarian passages before he obtains a residue that may be applicable to the tenth century."

74 For the lasting impact of nineteenth-century romantic criticism (mainly through the seminal work of Karl Krumbacher) on the perception of Byzantine literature, see Agapitos, "Ἡ θέση τῆς αἰσθητικῆς ἀποτίμησης", pp. 185–87; id., "Karl Krumbacher", esp.

decidedly negative assessment of the bulk of Byzantine letter-writing, as most collections are reticent about the kind of details for which historians thirst – such as narratives about historical events, proper names, and dates – and instead abound in conventional motifs and phrases. Devoid of both the historical information they were seeking and the aesthetic principles favored by them, Byzantinists frequently vented their frustration with learned epistolography. In 1977, the editor of Manuel II Palaiologos' letter-collection, George T. Dennis characterized the average Byzantine letter as "about as concrete, informative and personal as the modern mass-produced greetings card" and concluded: "In general, then, Byzantine letters tend to be conventional and impersonal and, one might add, terribly boring."[75] Few Byzantinists would endorse such a view today, and it should be noted that, in hindsight, Dennis seems to have regretted his remarks.[76] As Hatlie already observed in 1996, few modern scholars would dispute that "epistolography is worthy of serious scholarly study",[77] and this is reflected in a plethora of monographs, collected volumes and essays that have appeared in recent decades.

Let us begin with the most important advances in *Grundlagenforschung*, that is, fundamental research that is commonly considered to form an indispensable basis for interpretive work – although this kind of research has been increasingly discredited in the humanities as banal and therefore in most countries receives little or no financial and other support, which is to the detriment especially of relatively young disciplines like Byzantine Studies in which essential groundwork is still missing for various areas. Since the publication of Hatlie's 1996 article and Margaret Mullet's 1997 list of then recent editions,[78] access to the primary texts has been further enhanced through first or new editions of several major letter-collections which are occasionally also accompanied by translations.[79] However, in addition to the need for more translations

pp. 7–8, 13–14, 20–22. Specifically on the problem of originality in epistolography, see Mullett, "Originality in the Byzantine Letter".

75 Manuel II Palaiologos, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Dennis, p. xix. More examples of this kind of harsh criticism can be found in Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 23–24.

76 See Dennis, "Byzantine Letter Writing"; id., "The Byzantines", esp. p. 159, n. 15.

77 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", p. 214.

78 Ibid., p. 215, n. 6; Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 12. For a comprehensive overview of editions up to the year 2000 see Grünbart, *Epistularum Byzantinarum Initia*, pp. 7*–40*.

79 In ascending chronological order of publication date: Ignatios the Deacon, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Mango; Barsanouphios and John of Gaza, *Letters*, eds. Neyt/de Angelis-Noah, trans. Regnault; Isidore of Pelousion, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Evieux; Anonymous professor, *Letters*, ed. Markopoulos (*editio princeps*); Michael Choniates, *Letters*, ed. Kolovou; Synesios, *Letters*, ed. Garzya, trans. Roque; Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, ed. Kolovou; Leo Choirosphaktes, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Strano; Symeon the New Theologian, *Letters*,

of the linguistically often – even for the expert – challenging texts,[80] there still remain whole collections completely or largely unpublished: Theodore Patrikios from the tenth (?) century, Hierotheos from the twelfth century and George Oinaiotes from fourteenth century, to name only the three most glaring lacunae;[81] and there are still numerous minor, mostly anonymous, collections and individual letters hidden in the manuscripts that await scholarly attention. Moreover, the editorial methods employed in existing editions are frequently problematic, and in light of growing interest in letter-*collections* as works of literature in their own right, it may become necessary to republish even recently edited collections in the near future.[82]

Letters of course continue to be used as a historical source, albeit with new methods. The kind of "fact-seeking" research, which sought to extract hard data from epistolary sources, while ignoring other aspects such as the formal composition and communicative function of these texts,[83] has largely waned and increasingly made room for studies examining epistolary practice as part of social, political and religious dynamics, while paying attention to issues inherent in the genre.[84] The only exception is perhaps prosopographical research, which however has also become more sophisticated in its methodology and sensitive to literary aspects of textual sources.[85] Similarly, attempts to "unveil" the author's personality and *Weltanschauung* through combined historical and formal analysis of letters – a supposedly personal genre in which writers reveal their inner self and express their emotions –[86] have proven problematic, and

ed. and trans. Turner; James the Monk, eds. Jeffreys/Jeffreys (*editio princeps*); Theodore of Kyzikos and Constantine VII, *Letters*, ed. Tziatzi-Papagianni; Michael Apostoles, ed. Stefec; Theodore Hyrtakenos, *Letters*, eds. and trans. Karpozilos/Fatouros; Michael Psellos, *Letters*, ed. Papaioannou; Nikephoros Choumnos, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Riehle.

80 See Prieto Domínguez, "Consideraciones sobre la traducción".

81 See Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins*, pp. 13 and 25; Grünbart, "Exploring the Hinterland"; Menchelli, "Giorgio Oinaiotes lettore di Platone".

82 See Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", p. 247 and Chapter 17, pp. 491–93 in this volume.

83 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", p. 222.

84 See, for instance, Allen/Neil, *Crisis Management* (pp. 14–25 on methodology) and further below on the "sociology of epistolography".

85 See, for instance, Lilie et al., *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. Erste Abteilung (641–867)*, pp. 34–42 and *Zweite Abteilung (867–1025)*, pp. 21–38; see also below on social network analysis, which frequently resorts to prosopographical data derived from letter-collections. See Mullett, "The Detection of Relationship", pp. 63–65 for issues involved in using letters as prosopographical sources.

86 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", pp. 222–23. See, for instance, Demetrios Kydones, *Letters*, trans. Tinnefeld, vol. 1, pp. 53–62; Kolovou, *Μιχαὴλ Χωνιάτης*, pp. 201–76; Ljubarskij, *Η προσωπικότητα*, esp. pp. 183–86; Taxides, *Μάξιμος Πλανούδης*, esp. pp. 149–70.

we now tend to think of the author's presence in his or her letters rather in terms of discursively and performatively constructed personae, which can vary according to context.[87]

Analysis of formal elements and typical epistolary markers – such as forms of address, structural patterns and style – which can be interpreted as epistolary conventions, as conscious literary choices or as indicators of social dynamics such as ritualized communication, social status and relationships, or all of this at once,[88] have been further pursued, primarily in studies on individual letter-writers.[89] Apart from the more easily attainable categories of figures of speech,[90] prose rhythm,[91] epistolary motifs[92] and literary quotations and allusions[93] – which are often simply compiled into catalogues and only rarely interpreted within the specific context of the individual letters – there has been very little literary criticism proper, and Hatlie's remark that "[t]he history of the Byzantine letter as literature in the strict sense still remains to be written" remains, regrettably, true today.[94] One reason for this lacuna may be the inextricable interpenetration of literary, socio-communicative and pragmatic elements in epistolography, and so it may be undesirable, and unfeasible, to isolate formal and aesthetic aspects in any history of epistolary literature. It may be precisely for this reason that the greatest achievements in epistolary research in recent decades have been accomplished in what could be called the "sociology of epistolography".[95]

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87 See Chapter 12 in this volume.

88 For the rhetorical-stylistic approach see Chapter 6 in this volume, for the socio-communicative approach see Chapter 11. See also Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", pp. 220–21.

89 E.g., Riehle, *Funktionen der byzantinischen Epistolographie*, pp. 217–42; Taxides, *Μάξιμος Πλανούδης*, pp. 287–303. For a structural analysis of middle Byzantine letters of consolation see Sarres, *Ἡ βυζαντινή παραμυθητική ἐπιστολή*, pp. 170–254. For forms of address in early and middle Byzantine letters see Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede*. For a specific type of epistolary exordium, with examples primarily from late antiquity, see Fatouros, "Die Priamel". For changing uses of 1st- and 2nd-person singular and plural in letters from the ninth through twelfth centuries see Chernoglazov, "Pluralis reverentiae" (English summary at p. 963).

90 E.g., Sarres, *Ἡ βυζαντινή παραμυθητική ἐπιστολή*, pp. 257–350 on antithesis and rhetorical question in middle Byzantine letters of consolation.

91 E.g., Kolovou, *Μιχαὴλ Χωνιάτης*, pp. 277–93; Taxides, *Μάξιμος Πλανούδης*, pp. 305–08.

92 E.g., Tinnefeld, *Die Briefe des Demetrios Kydones*, pp. 219–51; Riehle, *Funktionen der byzantinischen Epistolographie*, pp. 242–46; Taxides, *Μάξιμος Πλανούδης*, pp. 149–54. See also below, p. 22 at n. 114–116.

93 E.g., Eusthathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, ed. Kolovou, pp. *25–*75; Taxides, *Μάξιμος Πλανούδης*, pp. 261–85. See in general Littlewood, "A Statistical Survey".

94 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", p. 226.

95 See ibid., pp. 226–30 on the (then recent) work of Anthony Littlewood and Margaret Mullett.

Twenty years after the appearance of Hatlie's article, friendship is no more among the "very basic epistolographic concerns" that "still await the attention of historians".[96] Since Margaret Mullett's groundbreaking essay on friendship in Byzantium,[97] we have abandoned the view that epistolary expressions of friendship are merely rhetorical tropes, and take letters seriously as documents not only reflecting but performing – i.e., establishing, fostering, negotiating, etc. – relationships.[98] In conjunction with this increasing interest in friendship and associated roles such as patronage, social networks have moved into the focus of scholars working on Byzantine letters. Mullett's work – which with the help of analytical categories such as role relation, transactional content, directional flow and duration of interaction scrutinized the nature of each relationship in the epistolary network of Theophylact of Ohrid; reconstructed and analyzed this network structurally (e.g., its size and density, clusters within the network); and finally examined how the archbishop made use of his relationships[99] – again provided a major impetus and has remained influential,[100] although the field has also moved further, and so quantitative, computer-assisted network analysis is perhaps the one vision Hatlie articulated in 1996 that has been most forcefully realized since.[101] There remain problems inherent in the methods of network analysis, which are usually acknowledged but not always sufficiently addressed: the image of networks emerging from letter-collections are *representations* of networks, constructed and manipulated by the compilers of the collections in question: to give just one simple example, high-profile personalities such as members of the imperial family and the aristocracy tend to be overrepresented in collections. We therefore should be wary of falling into the positivist trap yet again.[102]

Epistolary communication and performance are further areas that have increasingly attracted the attention of Byzantinists. Often with the help of modern sociological and anthropological theory, case studies on individual writers or specific periods have examined codes and rituals of epistolary exchange, the function of gifts – which are no longer seen merely as "realia"[103] – and

96 Ibid., p. 247.
97 Mullett, "Byzantium: A Friendly Society?".
98 See Chapter 10 in this volume.
99 Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 163–222; see also ead., "The Detection of Relationship", pp. 65–74.
100 See recently Gaul, "All the Emperor's Men".
101 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", pp. 233–34. See Chapter 16 in this volume.
102 See, for instance, the methodological remarks in Schor, *Theodoret's People*, pp. 8 and 11–13, who distinguishes between intersubjective and perceptual/mental networks; similarly Gaul, "All the Emperor's Men", pp. 249–50.
103 See Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", p. 222 on the work of Apostolos Karpozilos.

humor, the role of letter-bearers, the interpenetration of oral/aural and textual elements in long-distance communication, and the performative afterlife of letters in intellectual gatherings (*theatra*).[104] Finally, I should mention that fruitful work combining literary with psychological analysis has been done on letters of consolation.[105]

Some of these advances have particularly benefitted from interdisciplinary projects between Byzantinist and scholars working on the medieval West.[106] This should not be a surprise: letter-writing and epistolary communication is a practice shared by almost all literate cultures from the very beginnings of the invention of writing systems, and similar structures in correspondence of different cultures may be explained by similar human needs for communication and self-presentation. Pioneering, in this regard, was the *Medieval Friendship and Friendship Networks* project (2005–2010), headed by Julian Haseldine, Margaret Mullet and Jón-Viðar Sigurdsson, and funded by the British Academy, which produced a number of comparative conferences with concomitant publications[107] and has had a continuing impact on scholars who show mutual awareness of research trends in each other's fields.[108] Although these interdisciplinary projects with western medievalists have proved productive, Byzantinists should seek collaboration with other disciplines as well. While we should consider crossing chronological boundaries into the early modern period,[109] a look further east seems particularly promising,[110] as scholars working not only on neighboring Islamic but also east Asian cultures are interested in very much the same questions as are Byzantinists.[111]

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104 See in this volume Chapter 11 on communication and Chapter 13 on performance.

105 While Littlewood's "The Byzantine Letter of Consolation" (see esp. pp. 36–41) is well-known and often cited, Sarres' excellent monograph *Ἡ βυζαντινή παραμυθητική ἐπιστολή* is hardly acknowledged in publications on Byzantine epistolography.

106 See Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", pp. 230–31 and 248 on the potential benefits of comparative research.

107 E.g., Grünbart, *Geschenke erhalten die Freundschaft;* Steckel/Gaul/Grünbart, *Networks of Learning*. See Haseldine, "*Medieval Friendship*" for a brief history of the project.

108 See, for instance, Ysebaert, "Letter Collections (Latin West and Byzantium)"; <https://www.imc.leeds.ac.uk/imcarchive/2013/sessions/312/> (panel at *International Medieval Congress*, Leeds 2013); Høgel/Bartoli, *Medieval Letters*; Carlson/Jeske, *Companion to Medieval Letters*; and Chapter 3 in this volume.

109 For Greek epistolography of the sixteenth–nineteenth centuries see the essays in *Πρακτικὰ τοῦ ἐπιστημονικοῦ συμποσίου* Νεοελληνικὴ ἐπιστολογραφία; for Western Europe see Van Houdt et al., *Self-Presentation and Social Identification*.

110 For diplomatic correspondence in and between Byzantium and other (including Eastern) realms, see the essays in Aigle/Péquignot, *La correspondance entre souverains*; see also Chapter 7 in this volume.

111 See, for example, Gully, *The Culture of Letter-writing* (drawing comparisons with medieval western Europe but not with Byzantium); Ghersetti, "The Rhetoric of Gifts"; Richter,

The various essays assembled in the present volume intend to provide accessible overviews of some of these research trends in specific areas of study for those readers who are not (yet) experts of Byzantine epistolography, but also to indicate new avenues for scholars and students in the field of Byzantine Studies. It should be understood as a companion in the proper sense: it does not aim to cover all relevant aspects and issues pertinent to Byzantine letter-writing in the manner of an exhaustive handbook, but rather as an eclectic guide giving orientation, raising questions, and providing inspiration. Several important subjects – for example, letter-writing manuals, letter-writing and religion,[112] letters and literary theory – as well as further case studies on individual epistolary oeuvres such as that of Theodore the Studite were part of the original publication plan but did not materialize. It is hoped, however, that this somewhat fragmented picture will not encroach on the usefulness of this volume but will, on the contrary, instigate others to explore those areas that have remained at the periphery or are absent from the volume.

The first section, *Contexts for Byzantine Epistolography*, introduces epistolary writing in cultures other than Byzantium as defined above, some of which are entangled with Byzantine epistolary traditions (Chapters 1 and 2), while insight into others may be useful for comparative purposes (Chapter 3). *Byzantine Letter-Writers in Context* presents case studies on two authors – one each from the middle and late Byzantine periods – who have left behind substantial corpora of letters (Chapters 4 and 5). The aim of the largest section, *Forms and Functions of Byzantine Epistolography*, is to provide a kaleidoscopic view of the great variety of different forms Byzantine letters could take on and purposes they could serve, which includes specific types of letters and intersections with genres, discourses and practices that are not genuinely epistolary in the narrow sense (Chapters 6–9, 15); their social functions as performative writings and pieces of communication that may focus on the "I", the "you" and/or the relationship between the "I" and the "you" (Chapters 8–13); and their representations and internal roles in visual and narrative genres (Chapters 14 and 15). The two essays in the final section, *Byzantine Epistolography and (Post-) Modern Theory*, intend to exemplify how theories and methodologies developed in other fields may be usefully employed for the study of Byzantine letters (Chapters 16 and 17).

Notwithstanding my hope that this volume will contribute to furthering our understanding of epistolary culture in Byzantium and beyond, and despite the

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Letters and Epistolary Culture (methodologically inspired by research on western epistolography); ead., *A History of Chinese Letters*; Shields, *One Who Knows Me*, esp. pp. 82–132 and 200–64.

112 See, however, Chapter 8, esp. pp. 234–39 on religious didacticism in Byzantine letters.

remarkable progress in recent years outlined above, much work remains to be done. We certainly need more case studies on individual authors and collections, including collections of sample letters;[113] on epistolary types (petitions, recommendations, encyclicals, ethopoietical/"fictional" letters, etc.) and themes (exile,[114] illness,[115] travel,[116] to name but a few of the most obvious); on formal and structural elements of letters; and on letters figuring in other genres, such as hagiographical narrative. These will be the indispensable basis for the even more significant synthetic studies on specific periods and on developments throughout the entire Byzantine millennium, which are almost entirely missing from our bibliography of Byzantine epistolography.[117] In all these, and further, areas, Hatlie's 1996 concluding remark still seems apposite as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century:

> Whatever the particular directions of future research, the larger picture is one in which codicologists, philologists, literary critics and theorists, and historians must borrow on one another's findings. Collaborative work is perhaps the best way ahead. Or, failing at that, scholars can and should cross boundaries into other fields as needed. The continued redemption of Byzantine epistolography may depend on it.[118]

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113 Chernoglazov, "Die Byzantinische Fassung des spätantiken Briefstellers"; id., "Ancient Epistolary Theory in the Byzantine School".

114 Mullett, "Originality in the Byzantine Letter"; ead., *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 274–77; Strano, "Il tema dell'esilio".

115 Mullett, "The Classical Tradition", p. 80; ead., *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 102–11. See also Volk, *Der medizinische Inhalt* (see pp. 498–500 the index of Psellos' letters) and Timplalexi, *Medizinisches in der byzantinischen Epistolographie* for positivistic medical-historical approaches, which can be usefully employed as collections of relevant letters.

116 Mullett, "In Peril on the Sea", pp. 272–84.

117 See the General Bibliography at the end of this volume.

118 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", p. 248.

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PART 1

Contexts for Byzantine Epistolography

CHAPTER 1

Letter Writing in Antiquity and Early Christianity

Thomas Johann Bauer

1 What Is a Letter?

A letter is a piece of written communication. It is used to convey information and instructions or to cultivate the relationship between the sender and addressee when they are geographically separated from each other for a considerable length of time. The formal hallmarks of a letter are the standard opening and closing formulas with which the sender greets the addressee at the beginning and end of the message.[1] Already in antiquity, however, "real letters", which arose from a specific situation in the life of the sender and addressee, stood in contrast to a great number of texts that indeed made use of the epistolary form, yet did not function (only) as communication between the sender and the addressee. Rather, they were written for a broad, potentially unlimited circle of readers, and on account of their content or style, they merit attention and significance as products of literary art. Nevertheless, the simple distinction between "real letters" and "literary epistles" does not do justice to the corpus of ancient letters.[2]

On the one hand, the letters of important figures were collected and published out of historical and biographical interest, with the result that non-literary occasional writing from communication with relatives, friends or other people accordingly attained the status of literary texts. On the other hand, in the educational culture of the imperial period the cultivated, carefully stylized private letter, which was virtually indistinguishable from a literary epistle, grew more and more to become the ideal embodiment of the letter among the Greeks and Romans. Once such private letters are written with the intent of publishing them later as part of a letter collection, the difference between "real letter" and "literary epistle" is definitively abolished. This fluid transition

1 For the definition of a "letter" and the problems associated with it, see Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, pp. 1–5; Doty, "The Classification of Epistolary Literature", p. 193.

2 The distinction between "real letters" and "literary epistles", which can be traced back to Deißmann, *Licht vom Osten*, pp. 193–98, has had a lasting influence on research focusing upon the ancient letter. On the problems with this distinction, see Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 88–95; Thraede, *Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Brieftopik*, pp. 1–4; Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, pp. 6–8.

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between "real letter" and "literary epistle" can also be seen in ancient letters that are not transmitted as individual texts or as part of a letter collection, but as embedded texts in other literary works. Although many (if not most) of the letters "quoted" in historical and biographical works are fictitious and are thus products of literary art, they imitate "real letters" in form and content, as they were in fact written in historically analogous situations. The same is true of the letters in novels and dramas. For example, despite their lofty style, the fictional love letters in ancient novels supposedly did not differ significantly in form and content from missives that learned lovers (at least) could actually have written.[3]

2 History and Function of the Ancient Letter

2.1 *Greek Letters*

The earliest evidence for the Greek familiarity with letters can be found in Homer's *Iliad* (second half of the eighth century BC). When the handsome hero Bellerophon rejects Queen Anteia, who is passionately in love with him, she accuses him of attempted adultery in front of her husband, King Proetus, and demands his death. Because the king does not want to kill him personally, he entrusts the unsuspecting hero with the task of delivering a letter. The exact content of this letter is not reproduced in the text, but it is intended to cause Bellerophon's death (*Il.* 6.166–193).[4] In the fifth century BC, the poet Euripides (480–406) structured the plot of three of his tragedies around a letter.[5] In *Iphigenia in Aulis* (115ff), Agamemnon lures his daughter by means of a letter to the camp of the Greeks at Aulis so that he can sacrifice her in exchange for the favorable departure of the fleet, but he subsequently tries to prevent his daughter's journey by means of a second letter. In *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (770ff), a letter causes the siblings Iphigenia and Orestes to recognize each other. In *Hippolytus* (856ff), Phaedra kills herself and leaves behind a suicide note, in which she takes revenge upon her stepson Hippolytus (who rejected her advances) by accusing him of adultery and rape.

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3 On this topic see also Chapter 15 in this volume.

4 See Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 39–44; Muir, *Life and Letters*, pp. 177–78; Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek Letter Writing*, pp. 59–62.

5 See Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 61–97; Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Greek Literary Letters*, pp. 11–13; Muir, *Life and Letters*, pp. 178–83; Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek Letter Writing*, pp. 218–35.

The works of the great historians during this time also frequently refer to letters and quote from them.[6] However, the actual wording of quoted letters cannot be considered authentic. Historians created or, at the very least, reformulated these texts with an eye toward the purpose of their portrayal in the broader narrative. The letters mentioned and cited by Herodotus (484–429) generally belong to the context of (secret) diplomacy, military affairs, and administration in the Persian Empire (Hdt. 1.123–125, 3.128, 5.14), but there is evidence that the Greeks were also familiar with the practice of using letters in this way (Hdt. 8.128). In a letter from the pharaoh Amasis to the tyrant Polycrates of Samos and his reply, private correspondence between friends can be observed (Hdt. 3.40–43). Thucydides (*c.*455–400) mentions several letters in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, generally diplomatic or official letters. Among them, he quotes correspondence between Pausanias (commander of the Spartans, 479–*c.*468) and the Persian king (Thuc. 1.128f), a letter from the exiled Athenian general Themistocles (*c.*524–459) to the Persian king Artaxerxes (Thuc. 1.137) and a long letter from the Athenian general Nicias, through which he informed the Athenians about the problematic progress of the Sicilian expedition (Thuc. 7.11–15). The works of Xenophon (440/430–after 355) also provide evidence of official correspondence in the Persian and Greek domains (*an.* 1.6.3, 4.5.26–34, 7.2.8; *hell.* 1.1.23, 1.4.3). In addition, Xenophon mentions a letter from one of his friends – the means by which he himself had been convinced to join the "Ten Thousand" (*an.* 3.1.4).

Even if they are fictitious, the letters of Pausanias, Themistocles and Nicias quoted by Thucydides document an interest in these famous figures that extends beyond the bare historical facts. The apparent biographical interest here in the great figures of history, coupled with admiration for their thought or stylistic brilliance, meant that from the fourth century BC onwards, collections of letters by important statesmen, orators, philosophers, and writers from 600–300 BC were compiled and published. The preserved collections, however, offer only a few authentic letters – that is, letters that can actually

6 See the detailed discussions in Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 45–60; Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek Letter Writing*, pp. 101–79; see also Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 125–33; Muir, *Life and Letters*, pp. 85–90; Sykutris, "Epistolographie", pp. 208–10. A (mostly) complete collection of texts of all letters that have been preserved in Greek literature is provided by Hercher, *Epistolographi graeci* (in alphabetical order); for newer editions of individual letters and letter collections, subdivided into standalone collections, quotations from letters, references to letters, etc., see Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 108–40.

be traced back to the specified senders.[7] The majority are pseudepigrapha or pseudonymous epistles: letters that were falsely written under the names of famous people in order to supplement existing collections or replace missing letters.[8] Genuine letters by the philosopher Plato (427–347) as well as by the orators Isocrates (436–338) and Demosthenes (384–322) have potentially survived.[9] However, the collections transmitted under their names originated only in the third century BC through (successive) expansion with fictitious letters. The rest of the collections contain no authentic letters. The earliest example of such an entirely pseudepigraphal collection are probably the letters modeled after the Cynic tradition and attributed to the Scythian Anacharsis, who lived in the sixth century BC and was counted among the Seven Sages (third century BC or second/first century BC). The other pseudepigraphal collections originated between the first century BC and the fourth century AD. These include the philosophical and didactic epistles of the Cynic Diogenes of Sinope (*c.*405–320) and his pupil Crates of Thebes, the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (*c.*500/490), the philosopher Pythagoras (*c.*570–495) and other Pythagoreans (including women) as well as the letters of the Sicilian tyrant Phalaris (*c.*570/555). Some fictitious letter collections examine a critical period in the life of a historical personage from philosophy, culture, or politics in the style of an epistolary novel.[10] Such "epistolary novels" were ascribed to the physician Hippocrates (*c.*460–370), the tragedian Euripides (480–406), the Athenian statesman and commander Themistocles (*c.*524–459), the student of Plato and tyrannicide Chion (mid-fourth century BC), and the orator Aeschines (389–314), as well as to the philosopher Socrates (469–399) and some of his students. The aforementioned collection of letters by Plato is also counted among the "epistolary novels". Two pseudepigraphal collections occupy a special

7 In his study of the letters of the Sicilian tyrant Phalaris, R. Bentley (1697/99) was the first to prove the inauthenticity of such a collection. See also Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 119–20; Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Greek Literary Letters*, pp. 194–96. On the ancient discussion about the authenticity of letters, see Sykutris, "Epistolographie", p. 213.

8 An overview of the state of the debate concerning individual letter collections is provided by Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 108–30; see also Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 193–233.

9 Plat. *epist.* 6–8, Isocr. *epist.* 2–4, and Demosth. *epist.* 2–3 are generally considered to be authentic.

10 See Holzberg, "Der griechische Briefroman", pp. 1–52; Muir, *Life and Letters*, pp. 200–03; Lesky, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, pp. 970–71. The qualification of ancient letter collections as "epistolary novels" is rejected by Costa, *Greek Fictional Letters*, xviii–xx, because in these collections the chronological sequence of the letters – and thus the advancement of the "plot" – is absent. On this point, see the correction by Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 231–32.

position because they were written under the names of recently deceased persons, namely the letters of the Roman politician M. Junius Brutus (85–42 BC) to various Greek cities and islands, and the letters of the philosopher Apollonius of Tyana (first century AD).[11]

In addition to the collections that have survived, it seems that even more existed that have since been lost save for a few fragments. Traces of lost letters are found in Diogenes Laertius (second/third century). In his work *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* he quotes letters of the Seven Sages and letters that were written to them, for example: four letters of the Athenian lawgiver Solon (seventh/sixth century BC; 1.64–67) as well as a letter from the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus (1.53–54) and a letter from the tyrant Cleobulus of Lindos to Solon (1.93); a letter from the Spartan reformer Chilon (*c.*560 BC) to the tyrant Periander of Corinth (*c.*627–587; 1.73); two letters of Periander (1.99–100) and a letter of the reformer Pittacus of Mytilene to King Croesus of Lydia (*c.*651/50–570; 1.81); a letter from the Scythian Anacharsis to King Croesus (1.105; not part of the surviving pseudepigraphal collection ascribed to him). Diogenes Laertius also quotes and refers to letters of several pre-Socratic philosophers, including Pherecydes (first half of the sixth century BC; 1.22), Thales (*c.*624–547; 1.43–44), and Anaximenes (second half of the sixth century BC; 2.4–5), as well as correspondence between the Macedonian king Antigonus II (319–239) and Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism (333–262; 7.7–9). At times Diogenes Laertius explicitly indicates that he is familiar with and has used collections incorporating letters of philosophers – among others, Aristotle (384–322; 5.27) and Theophrastus, his pupil and successor in the leadership of the Peripatetic school (*c.*370–288; 5.46). Most of the (now lost) collections used by Diogenes Laertius were undoubtedly pseudepigraphal (e.g., the letters of the Seven Sages and the pre-Socratic philosophers), but there were obviously also some authentic letters and letter collections. In the case of the letters of Aristotle, authenticity is dubious. However, the letter of Theophrastus, from which a short passage is quoted, is considered to be authentic. Genuine, too, are the three substantial letters by the philosopher Epicurus (341–270), which Diogenes Laertius preserves in the tenth book of his work.

Epicurus made use of letters specifically for the purpose of staying in touch with his many students and friends outside of Athens and providing them with solid advice, but he likewise used them to promote his philosophy and to induct

11 Other letters from both men have survived. Authentic Latin letters written by Brutus can be found in the published correspondence of Cicero; Plutarch also quotes three Greek letters in the *Life of Brutus*. Letters of Apollonius are cited in his *Life*, which was composed in the third century by Philostratus of Lemnos.

interested and sympathetic parties into it. (In addition to the three long letters preserved by Diogenes Laertius, fragments of shorter letters have survived.)[12] With his three lengthy letters to Herodotus, to Pythocles and to Menoeceus, which were designed to introduce the recipients to his natural philosophy and ethics and to instruct them in living a happy life, Epicurus established the genre of the philosophical-didactic epistle. This type of letter and its application attracted many imitators in antiquity, e.g., among the Roman Stoics writing in Greek, Musonius Rufus (30–108), and the Neoplatonist Porphyry (235–301/05). A further development of the philosophical-didactic epistle is the epistolary essay (a treatise in epistolary form), which treats scholarly topics in a less formal style (since these "letters" were never actually sent, the address to the recipients takes on the character of a dedication).[13] Examples include the three substantial epistolary essays by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (first century BC), where he discusses questions pertaining to Greek literary and style criticism. Some writings of Plutarch of Chaeronea (45–125) can also be classified as epistolary essays (e.g., *Consolation to His Wife*, *Advice to the Bride and Groom*).

The letters of Epicurus were collected by his followers. After the death of Epicurus, who was revered as a master and role model, these letters served as the foundation for the education of the youth in his school. They probably also prompted the composition of pseudepigraphal letter collections under the names of other great philosophers. For the competition between the Hellenistic philosophical schools meant that the followers of other schools also wanted to have similar "authentic" testimonia for the life and thought of founders and major figures associated with their school.[14] The fictitious letters of Cynics, Socratics, and Pythagoreans are accordingly designed to function as propaganda and publicity.[15] Other pseudepigraphal letters or collections, however, may have been composed rather out of biographical interest or with apologetic intent. The letters of Themistocles inform the reader about the exile of this famous politician and general. The letters of Euripides serve to defend the revered tragedian (who journeyed from Athens to the court of the king of Macedonia) against the charge of friendship with a tyrant. The letters of Plato justify the philosopher's unsuccessful attempt to implement his ideal state in Sicily with help from the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse.

12 On the significance of letters for Epicurus and his school, see Muir, *Life and Letter*, pp. 136–44, and Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 149–55.

13 A formal definition of the epistolary essay is given by Stirewalt, *Studies in Ancient Greek Epistolography*, pp. 18–20; in general see also Stirewalt, "The Form and Function of the Greek Letter-Essay".

14 See Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, pp. 22–23.

15 See Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 174–81.

Nevertheless, one should not interpret pseudepigraphal letters and letter collections as having solely propagandistic or even deceitful purposes. They are to be understood against the backdrop of educational development during the late Hellenistic and Roman imperial period.[16] As part of the preliminary rhetorical exercises used in schools (*progymnasmata*), students wrote letters pertaining to real or fictitious situations in the lives of historical figures. The purpose of this training was for the students to learn to empathize with others, to understand the lives and character of others, and to imitate their style as closely as possible (ethopoeia).[17] Through these exercises, students of rhetoric prepared themselves for practice speeches (declamation), in which they likewise had to speak in the character of great historical figures. As in the case of declamation, a number of fictitious letters from rhetorical training found their way into the authentic corpus of particular historical figures, simply by virtue of their masterly ethopoeia. At the same time, the published pseudepigraphal letters and collections served as intellectual self-assurance and entertainment for the elite. By reading the fiction and by recognizing the techniques of ethopoeia that were learned and practiced in rhetorical education, a reader of such letters could assure himself of his affiliation to the educated elite. Maintaining the highest level of historical accuracy or plausibility was not always a concern – rather, it was apparently just as entertaining when pseudepigraphal letters led the reader to the limits of historical possibility or even exceeded them. This is apparent, for example, in the fictional correspondence between Alexander the Great and his teacher Aristotle, which describes the wonders of India.[18]

The importance of entertainment is even clearer in the second group of Greek letter collections, which likewise have their roots in the ethopoetic exercises used in rhetorical education: the "character letters", in which the author does not empathize with a historical person, but with a literary figure – namely, with generic characters from Hellenistic comedy.[19] The pleasure for the educated reader was in the wit of the letters and in recognizing their

16 For more on the following, see Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, pp. 28–30; in connection with Hose, *Kleine griechische Literaturgeschichte*, pp. 192–96.

17 See Stowers, *Letter-writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, pp. 32–33; Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, p. 29; Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, pp. 6–7.

18 These collected letters are preserved as part of the so-called "Alexander romance", which has its origins in the third century AD. See Muir, *Life and Letters*, pp. 186–89; Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 169–92.

19 See Hose, *Kleine griechische Literaturgeschichte*, p. 194; Lesky, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, pp. 969–70; see also Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 255–338; Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Greek Literary Letters*, pp. 130–60; Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, pp. 31–33.

literary models. Five collections consisting of this kind of literary epistle have survived, which were composed between the second and seventh centuries AD. Claudius Aelianus (*c.*170–240), a Roman who wrote in Greek, portrayed the farmer characters of New Comedy as letter writers. Philostratus of Lemnos (160/70–244/49) occupies himself with typical couples in his erotic love letters to boys and girls. The collection of erotic love letters by Aristaenetus (fifth century) is similar. In turn, Alciphron (*c.*170–220 AD) adopts characters from New Comedy: in addition to fishermen, farmers, and parasites (freeloaders), courtesans are also cast as senders of his fictitious letters. Since these characters were not purely fictional, but rather famous courtesans of the fourth century BC (Phryne, Laina, Corinthian courtesans, etc.), his work represents a synthesis of the character letter and pseudepigraphal letter. The early Byzantine collection of Theophylact Simocatta (sixth/seventh century) attests that this form of literary epistle also enjoyed great popularity with educated readers in late antiquity and beyond.

The playful interaction with literary traditions characteristic of character letters, a connection to situations from "real life", and a strikingly elaborate stylization are also dominant features of the letters embedded in romances and other literary works from this period. In several novels, letters play a key role: taking inspiration from the story of Bellerophon in the *Iliad* and the tragedies of Euripides, letters set in motion a plot full of twists and illusions – but this plot always ends happily with the reunion of the separated lovers. Examples include the novels *Callirhoe* by Chariton of Aphrodisias (first century AD), *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius (second century AD), the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus (second/third century AD?), and the *Ephesiaca* of Xenophon (first/second century AD).[20] In contrast, Lucian of Samosata (*c.*120–180) opts for a satirical parody of the literary tradition: in his *True Histories* he depicts Odysseus as writing a letter to Calypso in which he regrets leaving her and returning to his wife (2.29.35–36).[21] The Saturnalian letters of Lucian also stand in close connection with character letters, since here in satirical refraction appear the typical figures of the poor man and the (collective) rich as authors of letters to the god Cronus/Saturn; the letters from God to the poor man and the rich parody the *Himmelsbriefe* ("heavenly letters") from ancient Near Eastern tradition.[22] In the context of literary entertainment, the letter containing a ghost story at the beginning of the *Book of Marvels* by Phlegon of Tralles (early

20 A detailed discussion with additional examples can be found in Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 135–68; ead., *Ancient Greek Literary Letters*, pp. 32–34.

21 See Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 133–34.

22 See Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Greek Literary Letters*, pp. 30–31.

second century) must also be mentioned, although it survives only in an incomplete version.[23]

Pseudepigraphal letter collections and character letters document an appreciation of the letter as a literary art form – an appreciation that increasingly affected mundane epistolary communication. This is documented in published late antique correspondence.[24] Due to the high literary artistry of these letters, their authors (the senders) are regarded as the great masters of ancient epistolography. Among them are Libanius, the teacher of rhetoric (fourth century), Aeneas of Gaza and Procopius of Gaza (both fifth/sixth century), the emperor Julian (331–363), and the Neoplatonic philosopher and bishop Synesius (*c.*370–412), as well as the highly educated church fathers Basil of Caesarea (*c.*330–379), Gregory of Nyssa (*c.*335–394), and Gregory of Nazianzus (*c.*330–390). Although these are real letters that were written for a specific occasion and actually sent to the addressees, the meticulous literary composition indicates that they were designed and developed from the outset with a view towards later publication. The published letters of private correspondence should showcase to educated readers the author's exemplary character and aristocratic ethos as well as his outstanding literary and rhetorical proficiency.[25]

In addition to letters transmitted via literary texts and literary epistles, a considerable number of non-literary Greek letters from antiquity have survived. The discovery and publication of these documentary letters since the late nineteenth century has expanded our knowledge concerning the everyday epistolary communication among the Greeks. The oldest original letters were discovered in the remains of Greek trading stations on the northern coast of the Black Sea (Borysthenes, Olbia) and in the northeastern part of the Spanish Mediterranean coast (Emporion). They are messages that Greek (Ionic) merchants scratched into lead tablets between the end of the sixth century and the beginning of the fifth century BC.[26] Yet most of the non-literary letters are from Egypt, which was under Greek rule from the time of Alexander the Great

23 See Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Greek Literary Letters*, pp. 31–32.

24 The first collections of this sort may have already existed in the second century AD; however, the letter collections mentioned in early Byzantine literature – those of Herodes Atticus (101–177), Aristocles of Pergamon, and Timagenes of Miletus – have not survived. Cf. Sykutris, "Epistolographie", pp. 197–200.

25 See Hose, *Kleine griechische Literaturgeschichte*, pp. 195–96; for an opposing view, see Cugusi, "L'epistolografia", pp. 381–83, who argues that the form and style of the letters was the primary motive for publication.

26 Texts with commentary in the *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (SEG): *Berezan lead letter* SEG 26.845; cf. 30.960; 37.634; 49.1027bis; 51.953; *Brief aus Olbia* SEG 54.694; *Briefe aus Emporion* SEG 37.838; 53.1153; cf. 38.1039; 40.915; 42.972; additional early letters on lead tablets SEG 52.1938. See also Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, p. 6 (with pp. 50–51

(356–323) and had come to be a center of Greek life under the Ptolemaic kings. The oldest original Greek letters discovered here date to the middle of the third century BC, the latest letters are from the early Byzantine period.[27] Under the Ptolemies, Greek was the official administrative language and lingua franca, and it remained so even after the Roman conquest (as of 31/30 BC). For this reason, only a few letters written in Latin or in the Demotic language (later Coptic) of Egypt's long-established population have been found. Most of the extant letters are written on sheets of papyrus, writing material that was produced from the plant of the same name. In addition, potsherds (ostraca), which one could use for shorter messages, have been preserved. Among the senders and recipients of the letters are members of all social classes and groups, including women, children, freedmen, and slaves. Idiosyncrasies in vocabulary, spelling, and syntax reveal that many of the letters were sent by poorly educated writers. Occasionally there are letters whose rhetorical stylization betrays the sender's higher level of education.

The large number of private letters among the papyrus texts preserved in Egypt documents an increase in written communication for all social classes during the Hellenistic period – an increase that continued unabated in Roman times. The roots of the spread of private epistolary communication lay in the conquests of Alexander the Great and the establishment of the Hellenistic monarchies. The campaigns of Alexander, the founding of Greek cities in conquered territory, and the increase in long-distance trade caused friends and family members to be geographically separated from each other for a long time or even permanently; because of this, letters were the only way for them to maintain contact. Furthermore, the often banal content of surviving private letters shows that letters were written not only for important matters, but that one wrote a letter whenever an opportunity presented itself to send a "sign of life" to distant friends and relatives.[28] This development benefited from the fact that in the Hellenistic-Roman period papyrus was available as a cheap and easily obtainable writing material for virtually everyone.[29]

Business letters form the second major group of papyrus letters, since merchants as well as various tradesmen and artisans in the Hellenistic-Roman period made use of letters to maintain their business relationships and handle

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and 195–99); Muir, *Life and Letters*, pp. 14–15; Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek Letter Writing*, pp. 36–40 and 42–43.

27 See Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 9–17; White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 4–8.

28 See White, "The Greek Documentary Letter Tradition", p. 91; see also Muir, *Life and Letters*, pp. 28–53.

29 Examples in Muir, *Life and Letters*, pp. 54–59.

trade. In addition, a great number of letters from governmental bureaucracy have survived, including letters not only from internal administrative correspondence, but also petitions from the public and edicts of the authorities.[30] The epistolary form, modeled on administrative use of letters, was adopted for other legal documents, even if they were not sent as letters (e.g., wills and marriage contracts). The category of official correspondence also includes the formal letters of Hellenistic rulers as well as Roman governors and emperors, the medium through which they granted privileges to cities or intervened to mediate conflicts. A well-known example is the edict of Emperor Claudius on November 10, 41 AD, which is preserved on papyrus; the letter was intended to resolve the escalating conflicts between Greeks and Jews in Egyptian Alexandria (CPJ II 153/P.Lond. VI 1912).[31] Since cities usually "published" official edicts that were issued in their favor by inscribing them on stone monuments, examples have survived from other parts of the eastern Mediterranean as well.[32]

2.2 *Latin Letters*

The origins and early development of Latin letters can only be roughly reconstructed on account of the troubled textual transmission.[33] A fragment of an elaborate letter from Cornelia (second century BC) to her son C. Gracchus has survived from early antiquity (a warning concerning his candidacy for the tribunate); however, its authenticity is not without some doubt. Reaching even further back are two fragmentary letters from M. Porcius Cato (234–149 BC) to his son Marcus. These letters establish the early Roman reception of the Greek didactic epistle and epistolary essays: one treats military virtues and duties, the other the responsibilities of a statesman and paterfamilias. But a clearer picture of Roman epistolary communication first emerges in the posthumously published letters from the private correspondence of the orator and politician M. Tullius Cicero (106–43).[34] Of the approximately 860 extant letters, ninety

30 See Sykutris, "Epistolographie", pp. 217–18; White, "Ancient Greek Letters", p. 86.

31 Text with translation and commentary in White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 131–37 (no. 88).

32 See Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, p. 10; Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 77–82.

33 On early Latin letters, see Cugusi, *Evoluzione e forme*, pp. 151–57; see also id., *Epistolographi Latini Minores* (texts with commentary). The standard work for the study of Latin letters remains Peter, *Der Brief in der römischen Litteratur*; for an overview of Latin letters transmitted in literary works with references to relevant editions, see Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 140–48.

34 Cicero's letters were published by his private secretary (Tiro) in a number of separate collections according to the addressee, but only part of these have survived. The collection dubbed *Ad familiares* consists of gleanings from the Middle Ages. The letters addressed to

were written to Cicero by important contemporaries like C. Julius Caesar, M. Junius Brutus and Cn. Pompey Magnus. The private correspondence of Cicero documents the lively exchange of letters among members of the Roman elite during the late Republic, as well as the typical subjects and uses of letters: recommendation of friends and acquaintances (*Att.* 11.12.2), consolation after a death (*fam.* 4.13; 5.16), lamentation of his own suffering (*ad Q. fr.* 3.6.1; *fam.* 14.3; 14.4), information concerning political events (*Att* 1.13) and private matters (*Att.* 9.19), but also friendly conversation about the more or less scandalous events of everyday life (*ad Q. fr.* 2.10) and instructions for decorating his country house (*Att.* 1.10). In a deliberate reference to Cato, Cicero stylized his treatise *De officiis* as a letter to his own son, although on account of its size, the work can hardly be called a letter – it had to be divided into three books. Didactic epistles and letter essays were evidently also among the lost writings of Cicero's contemporary and friend, M. Terentius Varro (116–27). In addition, a collection of letters from his private correspondence appears to have existed.[35]

The letters of L. Annaeus Seneca (d. 65 AD) to Lucilius lie somewhere in between private letters and literary epistles; these were almost certainly created solely for the purpose of publication and never sent to the addressees.[36] The letters play with the established use of letters by Epicurus for the purpose of spiritual direction and seek to introduce the general public to the Stoic philosophy and lifestyle. The letters of C. Plinius Caecilius Secundus (Pliny the Younger; *c.*61–114), which were published in nine books, likewise exhibit features of private letters and literary epistles. Because of this, there is debate as to whether they were ever sent to the named addressees or whether they were written solely for the purpose of publishing the letter collection as a book; the official correspondence of Pliny with Emperor Trajan from his time of service as an imperial legate in the province of Pontus-Bithynia (111/112 or 112/113) was added to the collection as the tenth book.[37] The correspondence of the rhetor M. Cornelius Fronto (which includes some letters written in Greek) also belongs to the second century.[38] The literary quality of the letters published in these collections is owed to the use of letters as stylistic exercises in grammatical and rhetorical education (Quint. *inst.* 9.4.19–21; Plin. *epist.* 7.9.7f.).

Atticus were first published in the Neronian period. See Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 156–65; Cugusi, *Evoluzione e forme*, pp. 159–76; Conte, *Latin Literature*, pp. 202–03.

35 On the letters of Varro and other Latin letters from this time period, see Cugusi, *Epistolographi Latini Minores* (texts with commentary).

36 See Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 166–74; Cugusi, *Evoluzione e forme*, pp. 195–206; Conte, *Latin Literature*, pp. 413–15.

37 See Conte, *Latin Literature*, pp. 525–29; Cugusi, *Evoluzione e forme*, pp. 207–39.

38 See Conte, *Latin Literature*, pp. 581–83; Cugusi, *Evoluzione e forme*, pp. 241–64.

The two (definitely inauthentic) *Epistulae ad Caesarem Senem de Republica* transmitted within the works of Sallust probably also belong to the context of rhetorical training and ethopoetic exercises: written in the style of advisory letters, they call upon C. Julius Caesar to restore the Republic.[39] The appreciation of the letter as a literary art form is also due to the practice of Latin authors prefacing their works with an elaborate letter of dedication, for example, the *Naturales Historiae* of C. Plinius Secundus (Pliny the Elder; 23/24–79), the *Silvae* of P. Papinius Statius (*c.*40/50–96), and the twelfth book of epigrams by M. Valerius Martialis (*c.*40–104).[40] The letter to the "publisher" at the beginning of the *Institutio oratoria* by M. Fabius Quintilianus (35–*c.*96) is similar. The art of letter writing reaches its pinnacle in Rome (as in Greece) with the artfully stylized and published private correspondence of late antique authors, including the pagan rhetor and senator Q. Aurelius Symmachus (*c.*345–402), and especially bishops and theologians such as Ambrose (339/40–397), Jerome (*c.*345–420), Augustine (354–430) and Paulinus of Nola (*c.*355–415).[41]

The poetic letter, or letter poem, is a special kind of Latin literary epistle.[42] Q. Horatius Flaccus (65–8 BC) was the first to publish two books of literary epistles written in verse (*Epistulae*); these epistles treat topics in popular philosophy and poetics.[43] He builds upon older Latin letter essays, written in prose on scholarly topics; of these older letter essays, only a few fragments and indirect testimonia (e.g., Cato, Varro) remain. P. Ovidius Naso (43 BC–17/18 AD) in his *Heroides* (letters from heroines to their husbands/lovers) transposed the pseudepigraphal historical-mythological letter into a poetic form. He was inspired to do this by his friend, Sextus Propertius (*c.*49–16 BC), who had written one of his elegies as a letter from the nymph Arethusa to her distant husband Lycotas. Ovid also composed elegiac letter poems with autobiographical coloring, which he sent from his place of exile (Tomi on the Black Sea) to Rome for publication; in these letter poems, he struggles to cope with his situation as a literary exile (*Tristiae* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*).[44] In late antiquity, this artistically exaggerated type of literary epistle was taken up by D. Magnus Ausonius (*c.*310–393/94).

39 On the letters and the discussion of their authenticity, see Conte, *Latin Literature*, p. 243; Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 146–47.

40 See Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 139–40.

41 See Cugusi, "L'epistolografia", pp. 380–81.

42 Possible Greek predecessors are discussed by Muir, *Life and Letters*, p. 184; Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Greek Literary Letters*, pp. 23–28.

43 See Conte, *Latin Literature*, pp. 295–96.

44 On Ovid's letter poems, see Conte, *Latin Literature*, pp. 346–50 and 357–58.

Non-literary Latin letters from antiquity have survived in fewer numbers than Greek letters.[45] As has already been noted, a few Latin letters are among the papyrus texts discovered in Egypt (from the first-fourth centuries). To the extent that one can draw firm conclusions from these (often fragmentary) texts, they are official letters from the milieu of the military and provincial administration. However, the most important find of non-literary Latin letters is from the United Kingdom. Here, among the remains of the military camp Vindolanda on Hadrian's Wall, about a hundred Latin letters from the years 85–130 were discovered.[46] Among these letters, which were written on thin wooden tablets, were official letters of Roman military commanders, but also the private correspondence of the soldiers stationed here and their wives, as well as that of merchants. From these occasional writings, a similar picture of the private, official, and commercial correspondence emerges as from the (predominantly Greek) papyrus letters found in Egypt.

2.3 *Early Christian Letters*

The Roman imperial period was the golden age of the letter – literary and non-literary alike – among the Greeks and Romans. Early Christianity also participated in this literary heyday: the movement itself actually developed through letter-writers, generating both real letters and literary epistles.[47] Functions of letters in (early) Christianity included religious and moral instruction, theological propaganda, pastoral care and counseling, and the exercise of (official) authority within church leadership.[48] The history of Christian letters begins around the year 50 AD with the Jewish Christian missionary Saul/Paul (from Tarsus in Cilicia). Thirteen letters are preserved in the New Testament under his name; however, they differ so much from one another in language and style, as well as in their theological ideas, that all of them could not have been produced by the same author. Only the letter to the Romans, both letters to the Corinthians, the letter to the Galatians, the letter to the Philippians, the first of the two letters to the Thessalonians, and the letter to Philemon (and his

45 An overview of the extant letters can be found in Cugusi, *Evoluzione e forme*, pp. 271–84; see also Cugusi, *Corpus Epistularum Latinarum Papyris Tabulis Ostracis servatarum* (texts with commentary).

46 Details in Cugusi, "Leggendo le tavolette latine di Vindolanda"; Bowman, *Life and Letters*.

47 See Stowers, *Letter-writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, p. 15.

48 An overview of letters in early Christianity and the early church can be found in Löhr, "Brief"; see also Stowers, *Letter-writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, pp. 41–47; Neil/Allen, *Collecting Early Christian Letters*; on early Christian letters, see also Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, pp. 71–78; Muir, *Life and Letters*, pp. 148–76; Vielhauer, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur*; on the letters of the New Testament, see Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 355–434 (here one may find further literature on individual letters).

house church) can be definitively traced back to Paul. Paul uses letters to stay in touch with churches he founded, to clarify theological issues from afar, and to give instructions for church life.[49] The letter to the Romans is an exception, as Paul contacts a church that he has not established and with which he has no personal connection. Through this letter, which provides a comprehensive exposition of Pauline missionary preaching, he wants to commend himself to the Christians in Rome and win their support for the planned mission to Spain. The hypothesis that Paul's letters to churches draw upon a Jewish tradition has been repeatedly discussed, but the sources argue against this notion. Aside from a festal letter from the community at Jerusalem to the Jews of Alexandria in the year 124 BC (2 Macc 1.1–9) and a second fictitious festal letter, which claims to have been written in 164 BC (2 Macc 10.1–2.19), the Jewish tradition offers only a few letters, which are attributed to rabbis from the first to third centuries.[50] In terms of its use as an instrument of religious and moral instruction, the letter does not appear to have had the same significance in early Judaism and among the early rabbis as it did among the first Christians. It seems more likely, therefore, that Christian letters to churches (as first represented by Paul's letters) drew upon the tradition of the philosophical-didactic epistle established by Epicurus, which – in addition to propaganda and authoritative instruction – includes cultivation of relationships, spiritual direction, and counseling.

The remaining New Testament letters naming Paul as the sender are pseudepigraphal writings that cropped up (probably in Ephesus) among Paul's students after his death. The letter to the Colossians, the letter to the Ephesians, and the second letter to the Thessalonians belong to the first generation after Paul (the deutero-Pauline period, *c.*70/90). They were composed on account of new theological challenges and "intra-ecclesial" controversies, which made it necessary to adapt and safeguard Paul's doctrinal tradition. The two letters to Timothy and the letter to Titus originated as a corpus another generation later (the trito-Pauline period, *c.*100/120). These letters make use of Paul's authority to legitimize the institution of fixed offices to govern the Pauline communities and to establish the officers as guarantors of authentic tradition. The deutero and trito-Pauline letters are accordingly neither ethopoetic exercises nor an expression of biographical interest in a major figure from the early years of

49 See Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, pp. 76–77.

50 On early Jewish letters, see Alexander, "Epistolary Literature", pp. 579–82; Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 229–48 and 253–89; Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, pp. 58–65; a detailed discussion is now available in Doering, *Ancient Jewish Letters*, pp. 28–376.

Christianity.[51] More letters were falsely written under Paul's name in the early Christian era. A note at the end of the letter to the Colossians mentions a (lost) letter from Paul to the Laodiceans (Col 4.16); a number of people exploited this to back their own theological position with a "letter by Paul".[52] Likewise, the fact that the two genuine letters of Paul to the Corinthians presupposes extensive correspondence between the Apostle and his church provided an opportunity to compose a third letter to the Corinthians; this was done to fight "false" interpretations of the two existing letters (namely, denial of bodily resurrection) with Paul's own authority.[53] Theological intentions, however, are not behind the Latin letter exchange between Paul and the philosopher Seneca, which dates to the fourth century; these letters are reminiscent of ethopoetic exercises whose goal is to explore the historical "possible".[54]

In addition to the deutero- and trito-Pauline letters, the New Testament contains other pseudepigraphal letters that were fabricated under the names of important figures from the early years of the "church". Two letters purport to have been written by the apostle and Easter witness Simon Peter. The first of the two letters (*c.*90) contains instructions for the daily life of Christians within their pagan environment. The second letter (120/150) is an updated revision of the likewise pseudepigraphal letter of Jude (*c.*90/100). This letter makes use of the name and authority of a "brother" of Jesus mentioned in the Gospels (cf. Mk 6.3) in order to fight back libertine trends in Christian ethics. The letter of James (before 100) also claims to have been written by a "brother" of Jesus; this James appears in Paul's writings and in Acts with the honorific epithet "brother of the Lord" as an authoritative figure in the church at Jerusalem. In addition to these New Testament letters, the pseudepigraphal *Epistula Apostolorum* (mid-second century) should be mentioned, which draws upon the authority of the entire apostolic college (the twelve apostles) in its take on Christological

51 On early Christian pseudepigraphy as a way to lend authority to theological positions see Brox, *Falsche Verfasserangaben*; see also Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 399–406; Muir, *Life and Letters*, pp. 174–75.

52 In the manuscripts of the *Vetus Latina/Vulgata* a short letter is transmitted that is not identical to the letter to the Laodiceans mentioned in the *Canon Muratori* (along with a letter to the Alexandrians) as a Marcionite forgery. See Röwekamp, "Paulus-Literatur", pp. 553–54.

53 The third letter to the Corinthians is transmitted in the *Acta Pauli* and is prefaced by a letter from the Corinthians. It is considered partially authentic. See Röwekamp, "Paulus-Literatur", pp. 554–55; for a detailed discussion, see Klijn, "The Apocryphal Correspondence".

54 See Röwekamp, "Paulus-Literatur", p. 554; Fürst, "Pseudepigraphie und Apostolizität".

controversies.[55] A late product of Christian pseudepigraphy is a Latin letter, which coopts the authority of Paul's associate, Titus, in order to reject sexuality and marriage (fifth century?).[56]

The three letters ascribed to John in the New Testament and church tradition are not pseudepigrapha, as these letters – which date before 100 – were written without any indication of the author's name and were only later attributed to the apostle John. In the second and third letter, the sender introduces himself as "the elder". Both of these short texts are real letters that were written to ward off "false teachers" who had appeared amidst the churches of "the elder". The longer first letter, which takes a stance regarding a Christological controversy, is similar to a letter essay. Although the epistolary opening and closing formulae are missing, the impression of a letter is given by the repeated address to the reader and the numerous references to the writing process ("I write / I have written"). The letter to the "Hebrews" (after 80) transmitted in the New Testament, with its complex explanation of the role of Jesus Christ, can also be considered a letter essay, even though this work names neither the sender nor an addressee and can only be recognized as a letter by the final valediction. Additional examples of the early Christian adaptation of letter essays can be found outside of the New Testament. The letter of Barnabas (130/132), an anonymous work that was later attributed to Paul's companion Barnabas, treats questions concerning the Christian exegesis of Jewish scriptures. Another work bearing features of a letter essay is the *Letter to Flora* (after the middle of the second century), the means by which the Christian Gnostic Ptolemy promoted his doctrine about the origin of the Jewish Old Testament Law.[57] He followed in the footsteps of his teacher Valentinus, who likewise used letters as a way of spreading his teachings.[58] Yet letter essays in early Christianity did not function only as (sometimes) polemically charged propaganda – they could also offer comfort and edification to oppressed communities. This is clear in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (155/160), a narrative recounting the execution of the bishop Polycarp of Smyrna; the report was not only furnished with an epistolary framework, but also sent as a letter. The New Testament book of Revelation (*c.*100) is also styled as a letter (e.g., it includes a salutation and valediction). A prologue with detailed writing instructions

55 The letter, which was originally written in Greek, survives only in an Ethiopian translation and in Coptic fragments. See Bruns, "Epistula Apostolorum".

56 See Sfameni Gasparro, "L'Epistula Titi discipuli Pauli".

57 The *Letter to Flora* is transmitted by Epiphanius of Salamis (*haer.* 33.3–8); see Löhr, "Brief", pp. 131–32.

58 However, the surviving fragments exhibit features more consistent with those of private letters.

preceding the epistolary opening both marks the content as a revelation to the seer John and gives the work the character of a *Himmelsbrief*.

With the formation of ecclesiastical organization and a hierarchy of church offices at the end of the second century, bishops became prominent senders of letters. Letters enabled them to stay in contact with other churches and their bishops and also at times to settle controversies over issues of doctrine and church discipline with harsh rebuke. Many of these letters are reminiscent of official and diplomatic correspondence of rulers and magistrates. However, the origins of this practice are elusive. Even before the establishment of community leadership under a single bishop, a letter from the church at Rome to the church at Corinth (*c.*96) was written; it is transmitted with the title (*The First*) *Epistle of Clement.* (Clement was apparently a prominent member of the community, who may have conceptualized and written the letter.)[59] The letter, the length and content of which are reminiscent of a didactic epistle or letter essay, intervenes in a conflict in the community at Corinth and authoritatively calls for the reinstatement of community leaders who had been forced out of their offices. It is hard to evaluate the letters to the communities of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, and Smyrna, as well as a letter to Bishop Polycarp, all of which purport to have been written by the martyr and bishop Ignatius of Antioch (d. before 117) during his transport as a prisoner to Rome.[60] The possibility cannot be ruled out that these seven epistles are pseudepigraphal letters that serve to promote the see and its prominent position in the church through the authority of Ignatius (after the mid-second century). The letter of the (aforementioned) bishop Polycarp of Smyrna to the church at Philippi is genuine; it responds to a theological query from this community (*c.*120/135).[61] The first time a bishop's extensive correspondence can be documented is in the case of the letters of Dionysius of Corinth (*c.*170), which are transmitted only through citations and tables of contents; these letters were sent to various churches and their bishops, including those in Athens, Nicomedia, Gortyna, and Rome. There is also a letter from Bishop Pinytos of

59 In the letter a single character never emerges (the pronoun "we" is always used). Only Eusebius speaks of an "Epistle of Clement" (*h. e.* 4.23.11). Clement was at that time already considered the third bishop of Rome, not counting Peter (Iren. *haer.* 3.3.3; Eus. *h. e.* 5.6.1–2).

60 The letters of Ignatius are transmitted in various versions (with different vocabulary, length, and sequence); today the so-called "middle recension" (following Eus. *h. e.* 3.36.2–11) is considered to be the original.

61 Dividing the letter into two separate letters has been considered; the final chapter (which only survives in the Latin translation of the letter) would then be the remnant of an earlier letter, which Polycarp sent to the community at Philippi along with the letters from Ignatius of Antioch.

Knossos and one from Soter of Rome to Dionysius (Eus. *h. e.* 2.25.8; 4.23). The letters cover questions concerning orthodox faith and the Christian life. In one of his letters Dionysius seems to have complained that forged letters were circulating under his name. Differences about the determination of the date of Easter are behind the (likewise fragmentary) letter from Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus (*c.*195) to Bishop Victor of Rome (Eus. *h. e.* 5.24). Other bishops, including Irenaeus of Lyons, also intervened in this dispute by writing letters. The extant correspondence of Bishop Cyprian of Carthage (mid-third century) is one of the earliest attestations of the use of Latin in the Western Church. The letters that Cyprian wrote to his community while in hiding during the Decian persecution (250) are instructive examples of the use of letters for the purpose of pastoral care (comfort, edification, and exhortation). The collection also includes letters written to Cyprian by presiders over other churches – including Bishop Cornelius and the clergy at Rome. During Cyprian's time, Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria maintained similarly extensive correspondence (which has been, however, almost completely lost). Dionysius is important for the history of Christian letters because the tradition of the Easter letter is first represented in his corpus; in this tradition, the bishops of Alexandria communicated the date of Easter to the churches under their authority and made official theological and ecclesiopolitical pronouncements (cf. Eus. *h. e.* 7.20–23). Letters were also used by episcopal synods (from the end of the second century) as means of communicating final, authoritative decisions in matters of church doctrine and discipline.[62]

The elegant style and meticulous composition of the extant letters of early bishops do not only attest to their authors' education; they also demonstrate that Christian bishops assumed early on that their letters were being collected as evidence of authentic church doctrine and practice and that they were being circulated among other churches. Bishops and other theologians also published letters specifically as theological and ecclesiopolitical propaganda.

The theological and Christological dispute between the opponents and supporters of Arius during the fourth century was thus fought with polemical letters to great public effect. The letters of the bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, which were directed against Arius, attained the length and scope of treatises. In the published correspondence of the great theologians and bishops of

62 In connection with the controversy over the date of Easter at the end of the second century, Eusebius mentions letters from episcopal synods in Palestine, Rome, Pontus, and Gaul (*h. e.* 5.23–25) and the letter of one synod (in 268) that deposed Paul of Samosata, the bishop of Antioch (7.29–30). Other examples can be found in the correspondence of Cyprian (e.g., *epist.* 57; 64; 70).

the fourth century, however, the dominant forms of self-representation portrayed the author as a rhetorically and philosophically educated theologian, a competent minister, a wise church politician, and a seasoned ascetic. These include the aforementioned letters of the bishops Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. From the Latin church, the letters of the theologian Jerome and the bishops Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, Paulinus of Nola, and Salvian of Marseilles must be mentioned. In a separate category is the (posthumously) published correspondence of monks, where one can observe through letters a Christian adaptation of the practice of spiritual direction going back to Epicurus and taken up by Seneca. Letters written for the purpose of monastic pastoral care can already be seen in the corpus of Anthony the Great (*c.*251–356) from Egypt, the "father of Christian monasticism". Letters by Pachomius (d. 346), who is said to have founded cenobitic monasticism in Egypt, and by his pupil Horsiese have also survived, some of which have features of spiritual testaments. The most important collection, however, is the correspondence of the monks Barsanuphius (d. *c.*540) and John of Gaza (d. *c.*530).

3 Practical Aspects of Epistolary Correspondence

Letters in antiquity were written on various materials. Lead sheets or wax tablets, upon which one could scratch messages with a metal stylus, were replaced in the Hellenistic-Roman period by potsherds, sheets of papyrus, and wooden tablets; one wrote upon these materials with a sharpened reed and ink made from soot and a rubbery gum adhesive.[63] Because the task of writing was especially difficult on papyrus sheets made of plant fibers, letters were often not written in the sender's own hand, even if he/she could read and write.[64] The rich availed themselves of private secretaries from among their slaves and freedmen; the letter was either dictated verbatim to the secretary, or the secretary had to prepare a draft according to more or less detailed instructions. The poor could make use the services of private scriptoria or professional scribes available in the marketplace.[65] In a number of papyrus letters, a noticeable

63 See Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 44–54; White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 213–14.

64 A detailed discussion may be found in Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 55–60; White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 214–16.

65 That letters were often not autographs is shown by the fact that private papyrus letters composed by the same person frequently feature different scripts; e.g., P.Mich. VIII 490 and 491 (SB IV 7352 and 7353; second century), P.Amh. II 131 and 132 (second century). See White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 215–16.

change in the handwriting at the end indicates that the valediction was usually added in the sender's own hand, even if a professional scribe had been commissioned to write the letter. The personal valediction served as an identification and was equivalent to a signature (which was uncommon in ancient letters).[66] Text appended after the valediction or in the margins of the papyrus sheet can likewise be identified by the different script as addenda written by the sender (such additions are also found in autographic letters). Because writing was tedious, it was a special honor among the members of the upper class to be deemed worthy of a handwritten letter – to the extent that an apology was required in some circumstances when one could not write a letter to a friend in one's own hand (cf. Cic. *ad Q. fr.* 2.2.1). However, one could also decide to write a letter by hand because it contained highly confidential and delicate information that one did not wish to entrust to the ears of a secretary or professional scribe (cf. Cic. *Att.* 11.24.2; 13.4.4; 8.1.1; *fam.* 2.13.3).

After the letter was completed, it was rolled up or folded and wrapped with a cord. If one considered it necessary, the letter was also furnished with a seal, so that the addressee could see that no one else had read the contents of the letter. While the government administration and the military had their own postal system, private individuals had to arrange the delivery of their letters themselves.[67] Generally, they were given to individuals who happened to be traveling in the vicinity of the addressee (*Att.* 1.16.16; 4.1.1). Since these bearers of private and business letters rarely came from among one's own friends and relatives, the confidentiality of the content and delivery of the letter was not always guaranteed. For this reason, in the case of confidential or urgent matters, those who had the necessary financial resources entrusted their own slaves or freedman with delivering the letter and bringing back the reply (cf. Cic. *ad Q. fr.* 1.3.4). The information needed in order to deliver the letter was written on the outside of the rolled or folded letter.[68] If the bearer of the letter knew the addressee and where he/she lived, the names of the recipient and the sender sufficed as the address; otherwise, more extensive information was necessary, as there were no street names or house numbers. Furthermore, papyrus finds in Egypt document that in antiquity, private individuals kept received letters as well as drafts or copies of their own letters (chartularies) in personal archives. Well-known examples include the "letter archives" of Zeno (*c.*250/260 BC) and of Lucius Bellenus Gemellus (*c.*100 AD).[69]

66 See Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, p. 25.

67 On this, see Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 61–63.

68 See White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 216–17.

69 On these letter archives, see White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 27–52 and 147–54.

4 The Form of the Ancient Letter

4.1 *Epistolary Theory and Style*

In antiquity, there was extensive scholarly discussion that derived principles for the form, content, and style of the ideal letter from a theoretical reflection on the nature and function of letters (epistolary theory).[70] The beginnings of this discussion are most likely to have arisen in the Hellenistic period. However, ancient letter theory is not definitively attested until the early imperial period (first century BC/first century AD) in the work *On Style* (*de elocutione*/περὶ ἑρμηνείας), which was transmitted erroneously among the works of the statesman and writer Demetrius of Phaleron (350–280).[71] In this manual, letters are discussed in the section on "plain style" (*eloc.* 223–227), "since the style of letters requires simplicity" (*eloc.* 223). After Pseudo-Demetrius, the theoretical discussion about letters first reappears in the third century with Philostratus of Lemnos; in a quarrel with the rhetor and imperial secretary (*ab epistulis*) Aspasius of Ravenna, Philostratus designated rules for epistolary style (*Letter against Aspasius* in *Soph.* 2.33.3). The discussion is renewed in the fourth century, when Gregory of Nazianzus gave a brief theoretical discussion of epistolary style in his letter to Nicobulus (*Ep.* 51). Around the same time, Julius Victor devoted a separate chapter in his *Ars rhetorica* to the form and content of letters. This is the oldest continuous treatment of epistolary theory by a Latin author. That said, scattered statements about the nature, form, and style of letters in Cicero (e.g., *fam.* 2.4; 4.13; 12.30.1; 15.16), Ovid (e.g., *trist.* 3.8.1–10; 4.4.23–26; *Pont.* 1.2.5–8; 2.10.17–20), Seneca (e.g., *epist.* 75.1–2; 118.1–3), and Pliny the Younger (e.g., *epist.* 1.11; 2.5.12; 5.1.12) show that people in Rome were familiar with academic epistolary theory much earlier. These Greek and Latin authors largely agree with the observations of Pseudo-Demetrius.[72]

Pseudo-Demetrius begins his treatise on letters with a definition taken from a certain Artemon; as the editor of a collection of Aristotle's letters, Artemon was regarded as an authority in this field, although he cannot be definitively

70 The sources for ancient epistolary theory mentioned hereafter can be found with text, translation, and commentary in Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*; see also Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 21–33.

71 On the sources and dating of the work, see Thraede, *Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Brieftopik*, pp. 19–21; Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 184–85.

72 Descriptions of ancient epistolary theory may be found in Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 34–47; Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 183–94; Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, pp. 33–40.

identified (second century BC?).[73] According to Artemon, a letter is "one half of a dialogue". This definition connects the letter to the literary genre of dialogue. But unlike dialogue, which simulates a conversation, the letter is part of an actual conversation that takes place in writing and with temporal delay on account of the geographical separation of the interlocutors. The letter is "halved" in comparison to dialogue because it contains only one side of the conversation: the response of the other interlocutor is missing. As a substitute for oral conversation, the letter should take its lead from the plain style of verbal discussion without simply imitating it. Since letters are written communication, they require stylistic care appropriate for the written form and a structure for the contents. According to Pseudo-Demetrius, a somewhat higher style is necessary because the letter is written as a gift, so to speak (i.e., as an expression of esteem and affection for the addressee). Likewise, in a letter one must pay more attention to clarity and precision of the wording, because on account of the geographical separation it is not possible to immediately elucidate difficult passages and clear up misunderstandings.[74] Pseudo-Demetrius also states that the letter's choice of words and style must be suited to the personality of the sender, so that the letter becomes the "mirror of one's soul". A letter, then, does not serve primarily to communicate information and instructions; rather, through its words, the sender can visit the addressee across the geographical divide. Letters are therefore usually exchanged between people who already know each other. This shows that Pseudo-Demetrius (and ancient epistolary theory as a whole) primarily focuses upon private letters – in particular, correspondence between friends.[75] The ideal letter is therefore a short and succinct expression of friendly sentiments (φιλοφρόνησις) and also contains things friends would say to each other in an oral conversation. It treats simple things in simple words, avoiding logical sophistry and speculation about natural philosophy. The philosophical didactic letter and the letter essay thus appear to be degenerate forms of the letter.

How much epistolary theory and its principles influenced the practice of letter-writing in ancient times can be seen in the wording of extant literary and non-literary letters, where it is insinuated that the sender "speaks" to the addressee through the letter, or that he/she – despite being physically absent – is with the addressee by means of the letter. Expressions of friendly sentiments

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73 Sykutris, "Epistolographie", p. 189, identified him as the grammarian Artemon of Cassandreia (second century BC).

74 See White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 190–91.

75 See Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 47–53; White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 190–91. However, a short appendix on official letters is found at the end of the remarks by Pseudo-Demetrius.

include concern for the addressee as expressed by a wish for good health, and especially references to remembering the recipient (and the recipient's reciprocation). The extent to which the friendship letter as a standard ideal dominated the practice of everyday communication is demonstrated by the fact that one did not abstain from friendly expressions even when the content of the letter indicates a profound disturbance in the relationship between sender and addressee.[76] Only rarely is a troubled relationship indicated by a total absence of the motifs and formulae associated with friendship letters.[77]

In addition to the aforementioned works on epistolary theory, two Greek handbooks have survived that likewise arose from the academic discussion concerning epistolary form and style; however, these manuals were intended to provide instructions and assistance in writing letters.[78] The older of the two handbooks has the title *Epistolary Types* (τύποι ἐπιστολικοί) and was also transmitted erroneously among the works of Demetrius of Phaleron. The book attained its current form in the second or third century, but its core may be older (second/first century BC). After an introductory section on the content and purpose of the work, 21 types of letters are presented, each with a definition and an example. The work is not intended for beginners, but rather for professional epistolographers working for official chanceries. The second work, entitled *Epistolary Styles* (ἐπιστολιμαῖοι χαρακτῆρες), is significantly later (fourth/sixth century) and is transmitted in two different versions: one under the name of the rhetor Libanius and one under the philosopher Proclus. In this manual, the number of letter types has risen to 41 (agreeing only partially with those of Pseudo-Demetrius). The types of letters in both handbooks are in some cases hard for the modern reader to identify and distinguish from each other. The following types of letters are unproblematic: the letter of recommendation

76 A characteristic example is P.Lond. I 42 (= UPZ I 59/SP I 97; 168 BC), a letter from Isias to her husband Hephaistion, who was living as a recluse in the Serapeum at Memphis while she and their child were left alone, struggling to survive. Although the body of the letter contains accusations written in a harsh tone, motifs associated with friendship letters are prevalent at the beginning and end. Text and translation in White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 65–66 (no. 34); see Muir, *Life and Letters*, pp. 49–50; Bagnall/Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, pp. 111–12; Stowers, *Letter-writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, pp. 87–88.

77 One of the rare examples is P.Paris 47 (= UPZ I 170/SP I 100; 152 BC). Text and translation in White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 75–76 (no. 42); see Muir, *Life and Letters*, p. 51; Stowers, *Letter-writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, pp. 134–35.

78 The text of both handbooks with translation and commentary is provided by Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*; see also Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 54–57; on the following observations concerning the content and function of the two handbooks, see also Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 194–205; Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, pp. 40–44.

(συστατικός), the letter of thanks (ἀνευχαριστικός) and the letter of consolation (παραμυθητικός). In contrast, it is difficult to figure out how a blaming letter (μεμπτικός) differs from a reproachful letter (ὀνειδιστικός), a censorious letter (ἐπιτιμητικός), an admonishing letter (νουθετητικός), and a vituperative letter (ψεκτικός). Behind such differences is the belief that there exists a certain precise number of situations in which one might write a letter and that each situation has its own type of letter. The letter situation comprises not only the specific occasion and function of the letter (request, recommendation, complaint, etc.), but also includes the sender's social status and his/her relation to the addressee.[79] In order to establish the right wording and tone, the social status of the addressee – whether it is higher, lower, or the same as the sender – is important to consider. The examples of individual letters thus should not be considered as templates, but rather as guidance as to how someone in a particular situation should write a letter with a tone appropriate both for the occasion and for the social relationship between sender and recipient.

Since differentiating and distinguishing among the letter types is difficult, it is not surprising that only in rare cases is it possible to assign extant letters to one of the epistolary categories. A significant correlation between the manual's examples and surviving letters can be seen at least in the case of the recommendation letter and the letter of consolation.[80] This can be explained by the fact that the two manuals represent an attempt to retroactively systematize the existing practice, but they only partially influenced the everyday process of letter writing.[81] However, two papyrus texts attest that letter types (albeit less differentiated and at a lower level) were indeed taught in schools during the imperial period.[82] P.Paris 63 (Kol. 8f. = UPZ 144f.; 163/64 AD) preserves the text of a letter in an irritated tone as well as a letter of consolation. The form and content of both texts indicate that they are not copies of genuine letters, but rather exercises for practicing different types of letters. In P.Bon. 5 (third/fourth century AD), ten to thirteen Greek and Latin letters are written

79 For a detailed discussion, see Stowers, *Letter-writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, pp. 52–56.

80 For the letter of recommendation: P.Mert. II 62 (6/7 AD); P.Oxy. IV 746 (16 AD); P.Oxy. II 292 = SP I 106 (25 AD), the creative adaptation by Dio Chrysostom in a letter to Musonius Rufus (no. 2 in Hercher, *Epistolographi graeci*, p. 259), and the letter from Paul to Philemon in the New Testament. For the letter of consolation: P.Oxy. I 115 (= WChr. 479; second century AD). See White, "The Greek Documentary Letter Tradition", pp. 95–96; id., *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 117–18 and 184–85.

81 Thus Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, p. 201, following Brinkmann, "Der älteste Briefsteller", pp. 312–14; see also Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 61–63.

82 See Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 57–59; Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, pp. 7–15.

down and assigned to letter types by means of titles (advisory letter, congratulatory letter, etc.).

4.2 *Epistolary Form and Formulae*

The structure of ancient letters is determined by conventions with fixed, stereotypically recurring phrasing and motifs (epistolary form).[83] Since the typical obligatory elements of letters vary only a little throughout antiquity, regardless of the social background of the sender/author, one can assume that epistolary form was a topic taught at the most basic level in schools at least from the Hellenistic period onwards, so that everyone who could read and write had knowledge of formal epistolary conventions.[84] A letter of Apollinaris, a Roman soldier who originally came from Egypt (second century AD), may serve as an example of what a typical ancient letter looked like and which elements were part of the epistolary form. The letter is part of a longer correspondence between the young Egyptian and his mother Taësion; two letters from this exchange were found in the ruins of the mother's house in Karanis (Fayum/Egypt).[85] The first of the two letters (P.Mich. VIII 490) was written after the young Egyptian arrived in Ostia. In this letter, Apollinaris informs his mother that he has arrived safely and that he has been assigned to the military port Misenum. It is also clear from this letter that Apollinaris had written an earlier letter to his mother (which has not survived) during the trip from Cyrene. Apollinaris wrote the second letter to his mother a little later from Rome (P.Mich. VIII 491).[86]

A Ἀπολινᾶρις Ταήσι τῇ μητρεὶ καὶ κυρίᾳ | πολλὰ χαίρειν. |

B πρὸ μὲν πάντων εὔχομαί σε | ὑγειαίνειν, κἀγὼ αὐτὸς ὑγειαίνω καὶ τὸ προσκύνη|μά σου ποιῶ παρὰ τοῖς ἐνθάδε θεοῖς. γεινώσκειν σε | θέλω, μήτηρ, ὅτι ἐρρωμένος ἐγενόμην εἰς Ῥώμην | Παχὼν μηνὶ κε̅ καὶ ἐκληρώθην εἰς Μισηνούς. | οὔπω δὲ τὴν κετυρίαν μου ἔγνων· οὐ γὰρ ἀπε|ληλύτειν εἰς Μισηνοὺς ὅτε σοι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ταύτην | ἔγραφον. ἐρωτῶ σε οὖν, μήτηρ, σεαυτῇ πρόσεχε, | μηδὲν δίσταζε περὶ ἐμοῦ· ἐγὼ γὰρ εἰς καλὸν τό|πον ἦλθον. καλῶς δὲ ποιῇς γράψασσά μοι ἐπιστο|λὴν πε[ρ]ὶ τῆς σωτηρίας σου καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου καὶ | τῶν σῶν πάντων. καὶ ʼγὼ εἴ τινα ἐὰν εὕρω

83 Descriptions of epistolary form and epistolary formulae may be found in White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 198–213; Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, pp. 17–25; Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, pp. 44–51. Variants in the individual elements of epistolary form as attested in the papyrus letters are provided by Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter*.

84 See Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, pp. 37–38; Muir, *Life and Letters*, p. 22.

85 On both letters, see White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, pp. 161–64.

86 Text and translation by White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, p. 164 (no. 104 B).

γράφω | σοι· οὐ μὴ ὀκνήσω σοι γράφιν. ἀσπάζομαι τοὺς ἀ|δελφούς μου πολλὰ καὶ Ἀπολινᾶριν καὶ τὰ τέ|κνα αὐτοῦ καὶ Καραλᾶν καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ. | ἀσπάζ[ο]μαι Πτολεμαῖν καὶ Πτολεμαείδα καὶ τὰ | τέκν[α] αὐτῆς καὶ Ἡρακλοῦν καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς. | ἀσπάζομαι τοὺς φιλοῦντάς σε πάντας κατ' ὄνο|μα. |

C ἐρρῶσθαί σε εὔχομαι.

D [*On the outside*] ἀπόδ(ος) εἰς Καρανίδα × Ταήσι ἀπὸ Ἀπολιναρίου ὑειοῦ Μισηναίου.

A Apollinarius to Taesis, his mother and lady, many greetings.

B Before all else I pray for your health. I myself am well, and I make obeisance on your behalf before the gods of this place. I wish you to know, mother, that I arrived in Rome in good health on the 25th of the month Pachon and was assigned to Misenum. But I have not yet learned my century, for I had not gone to Misenum when I wrote you this letter. I beg you then, mother, take care of yourself, and do not worry about me, for I have come into a fine place. Please write to me about your welfare and that of my brothers and all your kinsfolk. And for my part, if I find someone [to carry the letters], I will write to you; I will not delay to write to you. I salute my brothers often, and Apollinarius and his children, and Karalas and his children. I salute Ptolemaios, and Ptolemais and her children, and Heraklous and her children. I salute all your friends, each by name.

C I pray for your health.

D [On the outside] Deliver to Karanis, × to Taesis, from Apollinarius, her son, of Misenum.

A. The conventional letter opening (prescript) is not formulated as direct address: ὁ δεῖνα τῷ δεῖνι χαίρειν. The sender is in the nominative case, the addressee in the dative. Because the greeting is expressed by an infinitive, it is an incomplete sentence, to which the corresponding predicate "[He] says" must be added.[87] As in the letter of Apollinaris, the basic formula can be expanded.[88] The greeting can be intensified by the addition of πολλά/πλεῖστα. In the late Hellenistic and early Roman period, the greeting is often connected with a wish for health (χαίρειν καὶ ἐρρῶσθαι, or later χαίρειν καὶ (διὰ παντὸς) ὑγιαίνειν). Often a specification of kinship (father, mother, brother, sister) or an expression of respect (Sir, Madam) or esteem (φιλτάτῳ/τιμιωτάτῳ) is added to the

87 On the origins of the formula, see Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 155–58; Dziatzko, "Brief", p. 839.

88 See Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter*, pp. 62–63.

names of the addressee.[89] From this practice developed the Roman custom of specifying as many offices and public roles (with accompanying pompous titles) as possible for both sender and recipient; this was especially common in official letters.[90] Deviations from the basic form of the prescript are rare and usually determined by the function of the letter.[91] In official letters, the name of the addressee usually preceded that of the sender (τῷ δεῖνι χαίρειν ὁ δεῖνα) as a sign of respect, and in business letters the prescript generally took the form (ὑπόμνημα) τῷ δεῖνι παρὰ τοῦ δεῖνος. In letters of condolence and consolation, the greeting χαίρειν was thought to be unsuitable on account of its literal meaning ("rejoice") and was replaced with εὖ πράσσειν, εὐψυχεῖν, or εὐθυμεῖν. From the first century AD, the formulation of the greeting as a direct address is also used, either with the imperative χαῖρε or the optative χαίροις.

B. The main section of the letter (the body) contains the actual reasons for writing the letter and usually begins (as in the letter of Apollinaris) with a wish for the recipient's health or well-being (πρὸ μὲν πάντων εὔχομαί σε ὑγιαίνειν is one of the typical formulations).[92] Usually connected to this is a note stating that the sender is also well. In letters from the imperial period, it is typical to find an addition to the wish for health – namely, a note stating that the sender continually remembers the addressee in prayer: τὸ προσκύνημά σου ποιῶ παρὰ … (referred to as a *proskynema* formula, after its key term).[93] Thus, at the very beginning of the main section, the nature of the letter as emphasized in epistolary theory is clearly apparent: it serves as an expression of friendly sentiment and intimacy. The communication of information and thereby the core of the body is usually initiated by the disclosure formula γινώσκειν σε θέλω, as in the letter of Apollinaris.[94] The central body of the letter is often, as in

89 For a detailed discussion, see Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 97–127.

90 See Dziatzko, "Brief", p. 839; Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 95–97.

91 For details, see Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter*, pp. 64–68; Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 158–67; Dziatzko, "Brief", p. 839. Customized prescripts (formulation of the greeting) are also found in philosophers' letters (Plato and Epicurus).

92 For details, see Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter*, pp. 103–07; Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 133–39.

93 On the formula, see Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter*, pp. 107–11; Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 139–45. The name of the god can vary. In Egyptian papyrus letters, Sarapis is most commonly used; instead of a deity's name, a general reference to the gods can also be used, as in the letter of Apollinaris.

94 See White, *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter*, pp. 2–5; Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 77–78.

the letter of Apollinaris, very short. The wish for his mother to take care of herself and the reassurance that the sender is well reiterate the standard epistolary motif of friendly closeness and concern; these are among the traditional phrases for closing the body of the letter.[95] The request for a letter from the recipient and the sender's promise to write again are also among the recurring motifs and phrases that are due to the friendly nature of the letter. A fixed element at the end of the body of the letter are the subsequent instructions for various greetings. Behind these greetings is a feeling of intimacy between the addressee and his family; often instructions to greet others are also combined with greetings sent from others ("you are greeted by …").[96]

C. The traditional letter closing (postscript) consists of the simple valediction ἔρρωσο/ἔρρωσθε or εὐτύχει; from the second century AD, the more polite phrasing ἐρρῶσθαί σε εὔχομαι is also available (which Apollinaris uses).[97] Ancient letters did not incorporate a personal signature. The added handwritten valediction (normally) filled this role. Official letters were more likely to contain a date than private ones (Apollinaris uses one in his first letter).[98]

D. On the outside of the rolled or folded letter, a delivery note (external address) is written to the left and right of the cord (X); this often contained – as in the letter of Apollinaris – no more than the destination and the names of the sender and addressee (see above, point 3).

With regard to form as well as to epistolary formulas and motifs, ancient Latin letters largely conform to the practices of Greek letters, making a separate detailed treatment of them unnecessary.[99] The prescript usually takes the form *aliquis alicui salutem* ((*plurimam*) *dicit*) or *alicui aliquis salutem* (*dicit*) or *alicui ab aliquo salutem*, the postscript *vale* or *cura ut valeas*.

4.3 *The Form of Early Christian Letters*

Early Christian letters in their external appearance partially conform to the typical form of ancient letters; they differ perceptibly to some extent, but without completely breaking with the formal conventions of Greco-Roman letters. The most significant modifications to ancient epistolary form can be seen in the Pauline epistles; however, their form was not the normative model for

95 See Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter*, pp. 113–16.
96 See Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter*, p. 116; Koskenniemi, *Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes*, pp. 148–51.
97 See also Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter*, pp. 69–72; Dziatzko, "Brief", p. 839.
98 For details, see Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter*, pp. 78–100; see also Muir, *Life and Letters*, p. 56.
99 Descriptions of epistolary form and formulae in Latin letters may be found in Dziatzko, "Brief", pp. 838–840; Cugusi, *Evoluzione e forme*, pp. 73–75; Cugusi, "L'epistolografia", p. 386.

Christian letters. The most noticeable changes, which make the Pauline letters distinctive, concern the formulation of the greeting in the prescript, the way the opening of the letter's main section is composed, and the formulation of the valediction in the postscript.[100]

A. In the first letter to the Thessalonians, the oldest surviving letter by Paul, the prescript reads as follows (1 Thess 1.1):

> Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy
> to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ
> Grace to you and peace [χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη].

Paul seems to combine conventions of Greek and Semitic (Hebrew and Aramaic) letters in the formulation of his greeting. The Greek εἰρήνη is probably a literal rendering of the typical greeting *shalom* ("peace") in Hebrew and Aramaic letters; however, it is connected with χάρις, which is reminiscent of the usual infinitive used in Greek letters, χαίρειν.[101] Since there is no parallel for this greeting formulation in Hebrew or Aramaic letters, Paul himself may have invented it. In his later letters Paul expands this greeting to "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ". He thus makes it clear that his greeting is to be understood as a blessing that carries with it a promise: the gift of salvation through God.[102] In Paul's prescript, the emphatic position of ὑμῖν ("you") and the use of the first and second person (atypical in Greek letters) could be influenced by Semitic prescripts, in which the greeting is understood as the direct address of the recipient (cf. Gal 1.1–3; Rom 1.1–7; Phlm 1–3; 1 Cor 1.1–3). The copious titles with which Paul furnishes the appellations of both sender and recipient, as well as the insertion of early Christian credal formulae, set up the key messages in the body of the letter; these also have the effect of making the prescript unusually wordy in comparison to other ancient letters, especially in the epistle to the Romans and the epistle to the Galatians.[103]

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100 Discussion of Pauline epistolary form may be found in Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, pp. 25–55; Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, pp. 78–88; see also the entire work of Schnider/Stenger, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Briefformular*; a discussion focusing on Jewish influence upon Pauline epistolary form is given by Doering, *Ancient Jewish Letters*, pp. 377–428.

101 See Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, p. 30; a different interpretation is offered by Schnider/Stenger, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Briefformular*, pp. 25–26.

102 See Schnider/Stenger, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Briefformular*, pp. 28–33.

103 The titles that Paul bestows upon the sender (apostle, servant of Jesus Christ) help to legitimize the letters and establish the communication as authoritative speech. See also Schnider/Stenger, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Briefformular*, pp. 7–12.

B. In Greek letters, the reference to remembering the recipient in prayer (the *proskynema* formula) is usually connected with the wish for health and well-being at the beginning of the body of the letter. Paul expands the *proskynema* formula into an account of continual thanks to God for the current state of salvation of the recipients. In the first letter to the Thessalonians he writes the following (1 Thess 1.2–3):[104]

> We always give thanks [εὐχαριστοῦμεν] to God
> for all of you and mention you in our prayers
> constantly remembering before our God and Father
> your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope
> in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Like the *proskynema* formula, this account about the thanksgiving prayer is an expression of friendly sentiment and intimacy. In Paul's letters, this account is missing from the letter to the Galatians alone – a sign of the rift in the relationship between Paul and the Galatian communities. In the second letter to the Corinthians, in place of the report is a direct prayer, which begins with the word "blessed" (2 Cor 1.3–4; cf. Eph 1.3; 1 Pt 1.3). Paul adds to the thanksgiving prayer a kind of epistolary self-recommendation, which directs attention away from the recipient and toward the sender (1 Thess 2.1–12; cf. Rom 1.13–15).[105] In the tradition of the ancient friendship letter, this passage reminds the addressees of their existing relationship to Paul and permits him and his ministry to be present with the recipients ("apostolic parousia").

C. The postscript of Paul's letters corresponds to the greeting in the prescript and is likewise formulated as a blessing, which in its basic form reads as follows: "The grace (χάρις) of (our) Lord Jesus Christ (be) with you / your spirit" (1 Thess 5.28; Rom 16.20; Gal 6.18; Phil 4.23; Phlm 25; in 1 Cor 16.23–24 and 2 Cor 13.13 considerably expanded).[106] The formulation of the valediction suggests a Christian origin, without any borrowings from Semitic letters.

The rest of the New Testament and early Christian letters exhibit other characteristic features if and when they fail to follow the traditional Greek

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104 See Schnider/Stenger, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Briefformular*, p. 27; White, "New Testament Epistolary Literature", pp. 1741–42; see also id., "Ancient Greek Letters", pp. 92–93.

105 For a detailed discussion, see Schnider/Stenger, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Briefformular*, pp. 50–59.

106 See ibid., pp. 131–35.

epistolary form.[107] The prescript of both letters by Peter is reminiscent of the Pauline epistles, reading χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη, but the verb πληθυνθείη is added, thus calling to mind the greeting formula attested in Aramaic letters: "May your *shalom* be abundant" (Dan 3.31 MT [4.1 Theod.]; 6.26; Letters of Gamaliel). Similarly worded are the prescripts in Jude, the 1st Epistle of Clement, the letter of Polycarp and the Martyrdom of Polycarp; the prescript of the third letter of John exhibits an analogous formulation. These letters vary considerably from each other in the composition of the postscript. 1 Peter and 1 Clement modify the Pauline postscript. The letter of Polycarp used the typical Greek postscript (as far as the extant closing – which is preserved only in Latin translation – indicates). This is also true for the Martyrdom of Polycarp (but it is probably a later addition). 2 Peter and Jude, as well as the second letter of John, end without a valediction. The prescript of 3 John follows the traditional Greek form (without salutation); the valediction modifies the Pauline postscript in a way similar to 1 Peter. 1 John has neither prescript nor postscript. The letter to the Hebrews has only a postscript, which corresponds to that of the Pauline letters. The seven letters of Ignatius of Antioch follow the typical Greek format, but relative clauses inserted into the prescript make the basic structure almost unrecognizable. The distinctive prescript of the letter of Barnabas is reminiscent of the beginning of a speech: the greeting is formulated as direct address ("Rejoice"/"You are greeted") and the salutation of the addressees is in the vocative ("Sons and daughters"). The postscript is likewise unique. With σώζεσθε the letter of Barnabas probably presents a modification of the typical Greek valediction; added to this is a blessing and request for assistance, features reminiscent of the valedictions of the Pauline letters.

Despite the mentioned differences in form – which primarily concern the formulation of the prescript and postscript – it is unwise to separate early Christian letters from other ancient letters.[108] Early Christian letters, including the letters of Paul, are also clearly influenced by the conventions of ancient letters. This influence is more than just the mere acquisition of epistolary formulae. The differences between early Christian and pagan letters from antiquity do not lie in the form and the conventional motifs derived from epistolary theory, nor do they lie in the function and use of letters. The differences relate to the themes and content. In particular, in their discussions of sin and

107 An overview is provided by Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, pp. 88–90; see also Doering, *Ancient Jewish Letters*, pp. 429–97.

108 On this topic, see Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie*, pp. 400–04; see also Stowers, *Letter-writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, pp. 24–25 and 31; Hose, *Kleine griechische Literaturgeschichte*, pp. 212–17.

redemption linked with the promise of imperishable eschatological salvation through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, Christian letters look strange and different when compared to ancient pagan letters. Thus it can be said: the letters of Paul and other early Christian letters, like other ancient letters, were shaped by the model and standard of the friendship letter. They articulate clearly recognizable ideas that are characteristic of ancient epistolary theory: the letter as a means of surmounting geographical separation, continuation of oral conversation in writing, and the expression of friendly intimacy. At the same time, the standards of ancient epistolary theory were altered at their very core. The traditional popular-philosophical tenets of friendship that governed ancient epistolary form and content are already replaced in the letters of Paul by the idea of affinity in the faithful confession of God's salvific power in and through Jesus Christ. The early Christian letter, first discernible in Paul's writings, exhibits modifications of the conventions of Greco-Roman letters; these traditional conventions have been adapted to the communicative practices of Christian congregational life and the religious beliefs of early Christianity.[109]

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CHAPTER 2

Syriac Epistolography

Jack Tannous

1 Introduction

"Syriac" is the term that scholars now use to denote the ancient Aramaic dialect of Edessa, though for much of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, even into the early modern period, the word "Syriac" referred more generically to Aramaic and not specifically to the Aramaic of Edessa.[1] The Christian inhabitants of the Middle East in the late antique period spoke a variety of Aramaic dialects, but when it came to writing, if they chose to write in Aramaic rather than Greek, it was in the language of Edessa that they almost always chose to compose.[2] This means that an author who wrote in the dialect of Edessa may have spoken a different kind of Aramaic outside his study,[3] a fact obscured by the habit of scholarship to speak of the Middle East as having a "Syriac-speaking" population on the eve of the Arab conquests.

Over the course of the first millennium, Syriac would develop from its home in the region of Edessa into an international language, used from Egypt to China. The quantity of written Syriac dwarfs by a vast amount that of all other dialects of Aramaic combined and classical Syriac is still written and spoken (even natively) today. The Syriac tradition has customarily been divided into

1 See, e.g., the rendering of the *aramīth* in Daniel 2:4 in the Authorized Version of the Bible and the Wycliffite translation of the fourteenth century as "Syriac" (or "Syriacke"), and compare its rendering in the Vulgate (*syriace*) and the Septuagint (Συριστί). Medieval Arabic texts which refer to *suryānī* should not necessarily be understood as referring to the Aramaic dialect of Edessa or to someone who was speaking or writing it, but to Aramaic more generally.

2 On the different types of Aramaic, see most conveniently Beyer, *The Aramaic Language*. Some Chalcedonians of Palestine and the Transjordan chose to write in Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA) rather than Syriac. The extant corpus of CPA, however, apart from a few ostraca and a brief letter, consists almost entirely of translations from Greek. For an overview of existing CPA material, see most conveniently, Müller-Kessler, *Grammatik des Christlich-Palästinisch-Aramäischen*, pp. 9–26.

3 Or, Arabic, as was the case for a figure like the great Greco-Arabic translator, Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq, who was an Arab from al-Ḥīra in southern Iraq, but who also wrote in Syriac. It should also be pointed out that other authors writing in Syriac may have spoken Persian or a Turkic language as their everyday language. For evidence of a native Sogdian speaker writing in Syriac, see Paykova, "The Syrian Ostracon from Panjikant".

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three broad streams: Chalcedonian, Miaphysite, and East Syrian,[4] and the geographical and theological diversity of the churches which used and use Syriac mean that Syriac Christian literature is remarkable for its confessional variety and depth.[5] Syriac was of course more than just a Christian language: it was also used by pagans, Jews, and Manicheans, though only traces of non-Christian Syriac have survived to the present.

The classical period of Syriac literature is traditionally seen as having come to an end in the high Middle Ages, after the deaths of West Syrian writer Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286) and the East Syrian ʿAbdishoʿ bar Brikha (d. 1318).[6] In Syriac, there are letters and letter collections of dozens of authors spanning all of late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Many of these letters and letter collections are either incompletely edited and published or not published at all, yet they nevertheless contain material of greatest interest to classicists, church historians, and Islamicists, among others. For students of Greek letter writing, Syriac provides an interesting point of comparison, for authors writing in Syriac often either knew Greek or had as theological authorities Greek figures who were known in Syriac translation. In addition to letters written originally in Syriac, a vast number of letters, originally written in Greek, were translated into Syriac and have often been preserved – sometimes uniquely – in Syriac.[7] Due to space considerations, however, in what follows, I will focus only on letters written originally in Syriac and will attempt to highlight some of the most important

4 The labels that have been used to refer to the various branches of the Syriac tradition are infamously complex and confusing. In what follows, I will focus primarily on the traditions of non-Chalcedonian churches and will use the labels "Miaphysite" and "West Syrian" to refer to groups which are sometimes also called "Monophysites" and "Jacobites" (though "West Syrian" can also be taken in certain contexts to refer to Chalcedonians, both Maronite and Rūm). I will use "East Syrian" and "belonging to the Church of the East" to refer to the ecclesiastical community that has sometimes been referred to as "Nestorian". On the difficulty of these labels, see Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church", and Winkler, "Miaphysitism"; and more generally, Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, p. 13, n. 9.

5 Though the amount of Christian literature Latin and Greek transmit is greater than what is present in Syriac, neither one of these languages preserves anything like the variety and amount of Miaphysite, Nestorian, and even Monothelete literature that Syriac does. This point is an expansion on the observation of Sauget, "L'apport des traductions syriaques", p. 139.

6 The still-standard guide to Syriac literature is Baumstark's *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*. This can be updated to a certain extent with information from Brock et al., *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*.

7 To give a single example: Sophronius of Jerusalem's *Letter to Arcadius of Cyprus* (eds. Albert/von Schönborn) survives only in Syriac. The easiest way to get a sense for the large amount of Greek Christian literature which has survived fully only in Syriac translation is to look at the bold-faced titles in Gonnet, "Liste des oeuvres patristiques traduites du grec en syriaque". Even this listing is not complete, however.

collections from the West and East Syrian traditions. A full treatment of all letters written in Syriac, extant and also those which have been lost, would require a small monograph.

If a distinction is made between a letter, something written privately to another individual for personal reading, and an epistle, something written with a more literary character to another person with the intention of having that writing circulate more widely and be published, Syriac is rich in epistles, but relatively poor in letters, at least from the late antique and medieval periods.[8] Syriac is poor in letters for the simple reason that few Syriac papyri are extant; apart from certain important monastic centers – the Wadi Natrun, St. Catherine's Monastery of the Sinai, the Enaton Monastery outside Alexandria – Syriac did not have a strong presence in Egypt, the source of vast majority of the papyri which have survived from the ancient world. Nevertheless, a small number of Syriac papyri do exist and among these is a sixth or seventh century fragment of a private letter, written in Syriac, from Krokodilopolis.[9]

Going back as far as the *De elocutione* of Ps-Demetrios, written between the first century AD and the first century BC, Greek and Latin writers had written about and reflected on the nature of epistolography.[10] In the Syriac world, Jacob bar Shakko (d. 1241) discussed the art of letter writing in his *Book of Dialogues*. Jacob's treatment included extensive examples of how letters should be addressed to different types of individuals as well as how responses to letters should be begun, suggesting that at least some Syriac letter writers relied on models and handbooks when they sat down to make formal compositions.[11] Several early modern Syriac manuscripts contain collections of sample letters written to a variety of different types of people – patriarchs, rulers, deacons, priests, even someone who has just had a son. Such letter models likely have

8 For the distinction between a letter and an epistle (going back to Adolf Deissmann), with the letter being "unliterarisch oder vorliterarisch" and the epistle "ein Stück Literatur", see Luck, "Brief und Epistel in der Antike", esp. p. 78. Classical Syriac is of course still written and spoken in the present and there are large numbers of personal letters – even emails – that are written in it.

9 For a survey of Syriac papyri, see Butts, "Papyri, Syriac" and Brashear, "Syriaca", esp. pp. 87–93 and the discussion and edition of P.Berol. 8285, the Syriac letter fragment on parchment, on 93–100. Brock's edition of the same papyrus is to be preferred to Brashear's. Nota bene: P.Euphrates 3–4 (eds. Feissel/Gascou), a petition to a prefect written in Greek, contains a Syriac subscription.

10 See Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*.

11 *Questions 23–26* of the *Second Memra* of the *Dialogues*: University of Birmingham, Mingana Syriac 75, fols. 82a–103a. On Jacob, see Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, pp. 311–12.

ancestors that go back into the Middle Ages and even late antiquity.[12] A sample letter, for example, scrawled in a medieval lectionary preserved in the British Library, is evidence of what must have been a more widespread phenomenon.[13] In this same vein, among the Syriac material found at the Oasis of Turfan in western China is a letter form from the tenth or eleventh century possibly meant as a model for use in communicating with a Byzantine official.[14] Indeed, Vatican Syriac 158, a ninth-century manuscript, contains models of letters to be written to priests and deacons.[15]

2 Letters in Syriac

There are two main Syriac words for "letter": *egarta* and *saqra*. *Egarta*, the traditional Aramaic term, is the most common and refers generically to a letter. *Saqra*, which came into Syriac from the Latin *sacra* via the Greek σάκρα, was used to indicate some sort of imperial or official communication; it began appearing in Syriac in the fifth century.[16] The Syriac tradition is celebrated for the richness and beauty of its poetic works and Syriac poets and writers going as far back as the third century would make use of vivid letter imagery, especially when speaking of God's communication with humanity.[17]

Perhaps the most famous Syriac document in the entire late antique period was in fact an epistle: the celebrated *Letter from Jesus to Abgar*, the King of Edessa. In his *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius reproduced the correspondence between Abgar and Jesus, based, he said, on Syriac documents located in the

12 See Mingana Syriac 16, fols. 51a–60a (dated by Mingana to around 1650, see his *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts*, vol. 1, col. 52; Mingana suggests that this work is excerpted from Jacob bar Shakko's *Dialogues*. This relationship awaits further study). Also compare Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syriac 248, fol. 65v (AD 1637) (see Zotenberg, *Manuscrits orientaux*, p. 202, no. 10).

13 See BL Add. 12139 (dated to AD 1000), fol. 1a, with the description of the letter form and reproduction of its Syriac text in Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, vol. 1, pp. 158–159.

14 Maróth, "Ein Brief aus Turfan".

15 Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Syriac 158, fol. 131ff. (see Assemani/Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus*, vol. 1.3, p. 307, no. 10). Vatican Syriac 158 served as the model for Paris Syriac 248 (see note 12, above, and cf. Zotenberg, *Manuscrits orientaux*, p. 202).

16 See Brock, "Mary as a 'Letter'", pp. 89–90 for these points. Other Syriac words for "letter" include *ṭumsā* (from τόμος), *nebishtag* (from the Persian *nivishtah*) and *enquqliyun* (from ἐγκύκλιον). For these definitions and etymologies, see Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, s.vv.

17 See Brock, "Mary as a 'Letter'".

archives of Edessa[18] and Egeria was told about the letter when she traveled through Edessa in the late fourth century.[19] The letter would be translated into a number of different languages, excerpted to serve as a protective amulet for individuals and was widely believed throughout the Middle Ages to provide protection to the city of Edessa; cited by Augustine and condemned as fraudulent by the *Gelasian Decree*, it was known throughout the late antique world, from Anatolia, to Upper Egypt, and even in Norman England.[20] Another letter, the *Letter of Mara bar Serapion to his Son*, may date to the seventh decade of the first century and be one of the earliest surviving examples of Syriac literature. The *Letter of Mara* is perhaps most famous for its reference to the death of Jesus, a reference which is extremely precious if a first-century date is indeed accurate. Less known, but also extremely interesting, is that the letter also contains within it what Baumstark thought were fragments of even older, pagan Syriac poetry, thus making it an important witness to what must have been a not insignificant body of pagan Syriac literature.[21]

The fourth century produced two of the most important writers in the entire Syriac tradition: Aphrahat and Ephrem. Both authors are noted for writing in a Syriac that, compared to later writers in the tradition, is relatively unhellenized. Both wrote a Syriac that is also extraordinarily beautiful. Aphrahat, whose real name was probably Jacob, lived in the Sasanian Empire in the first part of the fourth century. His *Demonstrations*, written in a pellucid prose, were a series of twenty three homilies on a variety of topics – on faith, on fasting, on

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18 See *Ecclesiastical History* 1.13, ed. and trans. Bardy, vol. 1, pp. 40–45. On the archives of Edessa, see Debié, "Record Keeping and Chronicle Writing", pp. 410–12 and Adler, "Christians and the Public Archive", pp. 929–37.

19 See Illert, *Die Abgarlegende*, pp. 120–31 and Egeria, *Itinerarium*, ed. Pétré, pp. 166–71 (trans. Wilkinson, pp. 135–36).

20 For the Syriac text of the correspondence between Jesus and Abgar, see *Doctrina Addai*, ed. Phillips, pp. 3*–4* (Letter of Abgar to Jesus) and p. 4* (Letter of Jesus to Abgar). For the correspondence between Abgar and Tiberius, see pp. 38*–39*. For the Syriac text of the Abgar-Jesus correspondence as found in the Syriac translation of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, see Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents*, pp. 2*–3*. Philips used a manuscript in St. Petersburg for his edition; Cureton had previously published the Syriac text on the basis of a manuscript in the British Museum (now in the British Library) which was of inferior quality to that of St Petersburg. For Cureton's edition of the Abgar-Tiberius correspondence on the basis of BL Add. 14654, see *Ancient Syriac Documents*, pp. 16*–17*. Segal, *Edessa*, pp. 62–78 is a classic analysis of the letter and its historicity.

21 *Letter of Mara*, ed. Cureton. For an argument that the letter should be dated to around AD 73, see Merz/Tieleman, "The Letter of Mara bar Sarapion" and see also, Millar, *The Roman Near East*, pp. 460–62, who also places it in the early 70s. For an argument that the letter is post-Constantinian, see McVey, "A Fresh Look at the Letter of Mara Bar Sarapion". On fragments of pre-Christian, pagan Syriac poetry preserved in the letter, see Baumstark, "Altsyrische Profandichtung", cols. 345–48.

prayer, on the resurrection of the dead, on humility, on circumcision, on the Sabbath and other topics relating to Jews and Judaism, and more – and key texts for our knowledge of early Syrian asceticism, Jewish-Christian relations, and Christianity in the Sasanian Empire, among other things. Aphrahat is known for his *Demonstrations*, but it is not commonly realized that Aphrahat's fourteenth *Demonstration* is actually a letter, written in February 344 to bishops, priests, deacons, and other Christians in Seleucia-Ctesiphon.[22] Indeed, in the early sixth century, all of the *Demonstrations* were apparently considered letters.[23]

Ephrem (d. 373) is regarded as the greatest writer and greatest poet in the entire Syriac tradition; in the Middle Ages, he was even called the "Prophet of the Syrians" or the "Syrian Prophet". Ephrem is most famous for his beautiful poetry – considered by some the greatest Christian poet after Dante – but he also commented on the Bible and composed prose works. A significant number of Ephrem's writings have not survived to the present, but Ephrem's extant works nevertheless include a number of letters. There is a letter written to mountain ascetics[24] and one written to Publius.[25] Ephrem also wrote five letters to a certain Hypatius, against Mani, Marcion, Bardaisan, and false teaching more generally.[26] Ephrem's *Letter to Publius* in particular stands out as a palmary example of Syriac *Kunstprosa* and its at times hauntingly prepossessing rhythmic style can be reminiscent of the *sajʿ* which gives the Quran part of its beauty.

If Ephrem is the language's greatest poet, Philoxenus of Mabbug (d. 523) is perhaps its most beautiful prose stylist: he wrote, as Assemani put it, *elegantissime* in Syriac.[27] A sharp critic of Chalcedon and a key leader in the Syriac-language non-Chalcedonian movement, Philoxenus was a prolific

22 Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, ed. Parisot, cols. 573–726. On the letter's authenticity, see Nedungatt, "The Authenticity of Aphrahat's Synodal Letter". On Aphrahat more generally, including information about his name actually being "Jacob", see Brock, "Aphrahaṭ".

23 See Brock, "Ephrem's Letter to Publius", p. 262, citing the colophon of BL Add. 17182 from AD 512, which refers to the first ten *Demonstrations* as the "the first letters of the Persian Sage" (Syriac text in Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, vol. 2, p. 403).

24 Ephrem, *Letter to the Mountaineers*, ed. Beck; Brock, "Ephrem's Letter to Publius", p. 262, n. 10, does not regard this as genuine Ephrem.

25 Ephrem, *Letter to Publius*, ed. Brock. The *Letter to the People of Homs* is not genuine Ephrem, but represents rather a translation from a Greek letter, perhaps by Severus of Antioch. See Brock, "An Excerpt from a Letter to the People of Homs".

26 Ephrem, *Letters to Hypatius*, ed. Overbeck (first letter); ed. Mitchell (second through fifth letters). On the letter as a "discourse" in early Syriac literature, see Brock, "Ephrem's Letter to Publius", p. 262.

27 See Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 2, p. 20. The beauty of Philoxenus' style was recognized in antiquity; see the remarks of de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog*, pp. 20–21.

author and was concerned with spiritual and ascetic excellence and not just doctrinal rectitude.[28] His literary output included a number of letters, some of which, like his *Letter to the Monks of Senun*, were lengthy and important dogmatic treatises. In late antiquity, Philoxenus' letters were apparently put into collections, but a good deal seems to have failed to be transmitted: Elia of Qartmin knew of 22 volumes of Philoxenus' letters in the thirteenth century. Today, however, only some 27 epistles are still extant in full or fragmentary form. Four more letters, no longer extant, are known through references in the writings of Philoxenus and others.[29]

Jacob of Sarugh (d. 521) stands, along with Philoxenus, as one of the most important Syriac-speaking non-Chalcedonian Miaphysites of the sixth century. He is also widely regarded as the greatest poet in the Syriac tradition after Ephrem the Syrian. Because of the extent and beauty of his poetry, and also because he apparently did not relish harsh theological polemics, Jacob has been claimed by more than one ecclesiastical community, and Jacob's attitude to Chalcedon provoked scholarly debate in the mid-twentieth century.[30] It is now widely recognized, however, that Jacob did in fact reject the Council of Chalcedon and Jacob's letters, particularly his correspondence with the Monastery of Mar Bassus (Letters 13–17), have played an important role in settling this point of controversy.[31] Forty-three letters written by Jacob are still extant; apart from the issue of Jacob's precise stance on Chalcedon, these writings show that he was in contact with Christians not just across northern Syria, but all over the Near East – addressees include Christians in Sasanian Arzun (Letter 6), monks on Mt Sinai (Letter 7), and Himyarite Christians in Najran in

28 For a convenient overview of Philoxenus' work and of works about him, see Michelson, "A Bibliographic Clavis".

29 De Halleux assembled the evidence for all of Philoxenus' extant letters and summarized their contents in *Philoxène de Mabbog*, pp. 189–223 (nineteen dogmatic letters), 253–74 (eight spiritual letters). For Elia of Qartmin's reference to twenty-two volumes, see ibid., p. 187; for references to now-lost letters of Philoxenus and the suggestion that his letters were collected in a manner similar to the collection of Severus of Antioch's, see ibid., pp. 187–88. The publication history of Philoxenus' letters is complicated. Full bibliographic coverage can be found in Michelson, "A Bibliographic Clavis", pp. 295–303. Conveniently, fifteen of Philoxenus' dogmatic and three of his spiritual letters have now been collected (with Arabic translations) by Akhras (Philoxenus of Mabbug, *Letters*).

30 For the mid-twentieth century debate, see Jansma, "The Credo of Jacob of Sĕrūgh", esp. pp. 18–19, responding in part to Peeters, "Jacques de Saroug appartient-il à la secte monophysite?".

31 See the remarks of Brock, "The Syrian Orthodox Reaction", pp. 450–51 and more generally Jansma, "The Credo of Jacob of Sĕrūgh". The recent publication by Roger Akhrass and Imad Syryany of Jacob's homily *On the Incomprehensibility of Christ, and His Birth from a Virgin* is also relevant to this discussion.

South Arabia (Letter 18). The letters also cover a number of different topics – a confession of faith, for instance (Letter 3), the nature of the sin against the Holy Ghost (Letter 24), consolation for a friend at the death of the friend's son (Letter 34), a letter to an archiatros encouraging him to be a physician of souls as well (Letter 36), or advice to a solitary who has had visions of demons (Letter 38).[32]

East Syrians, of course, also wrote letters in Syriac. Barsawma of Nisibis (d. between 491 and 496), for example, was a powerful and influential bishop of Nisibis in the fifth century who has traditionally been given a great deal of credit for pushing the Church of the East in a self-consciously Dyophysite and Nestorian direction. Five letters written by Barsawma to the Catholicos Aqaq (sed. 484–495/6) have been preserved in East Syrian canonical collections.[33]

The most important extant East Syrian letter collections, however, are from over a century after Barsawma flourished. From the mid-seventh century we have the letters of Isho'yahb III (d. *c.*658). Isho'yahb was the head of the Church of the East during the period just after the Arab conquest and his 106 surviving letters, written between the late 620s and early 650s, are of greatest interest for the light they shed on this important period of transition. The letters have been traditionally subdivided into three separate groups, each corresponding to a different phase of Isho'yahb's ecclesiastical career: 52 from his time as Bishop of Mosul/Nineveh, 32 from his time as Metropolitan of Arbela, and 22 from his time as Catholicos.[34] Like the letters of Jacob of Serguh, they show a figure who was in touch with Christians all over the Middle East. Though he was based in Seleucia-Ctesiphon as Catholicos, he would write to Jerusalemites (Letter 13), to bishops, solitaries and laymen in the region of the eastern Persian Gulf known as Beth Qatraye (Letters 17–21), to Edessenes (Letter 22), and to Simeon, the Bishop of Revardashir in what is today southwestern Iran (Letter 16).[35] Despite their style – florid, highly rhetorical and often quite difficult – the letters contain extremely precious references to contemporary events such as Heraclius' invasion of Mespotamia in the late 620s, inter-confessional relations among Christians in Mesopotamia, interactions between Christians and their new

32 Jacob of Sarugh, *Letters*, ed. Olinder.

33 Barsawma of Nisibis, *Letters*, ed. Braun (published again in *Synodicon orientale*, ed. Chabot, pp. 525–31).

34 Isho'yahb III, *Letters*, ed. Duval (complete edition); ed. Scott-Moncrieff (edition and convenient English summaries of fifty of Isho'yahb's letters written while he was Bishop over Mosul/Nineveh). Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3.1, pp. 141–43, published a list of all of Isho'yahb's letters from each of these three periods, with brief Latin summaries of each.

35 These numbers refer to the numbering of Isho'yahb's third group of letters.

Arab rulers, and even mention a large Christian apostasy to Islam in Oman. East Syrian missionaries had arrived in China in 635, about a decade and a half before Ishoʿyahb became Catholicos and it has been suggested that statements in his letters reflect the establishment of bishoprics across Asia, as far as China, that we know from other sources was taking place under his administration.[36]

The letters of Timothy I (*c.*727–823), another head of the Church of the East, also represent one of the most significant collections of East Syrian epistolary material.[37] Timothy (sed. 780–823) presided over the East Syrian Church during what may have been the height of its geographical extent and during one of the most intellectually fruitful and productive periods of its entire history – it was members of his church who formed the majority of the Greco-Arabic translators of Baghdad.[38] In the fourteenth century, ʿAbdishoʿ knew of a collection of 200 letters of Timothy, but only 59 complete letters have survived to the present transmitted via a single manuscript copied out in 1299.[39] These letters open up a rich world and cover a variety of topics: the nature of the soul, for example, is the subject of Letter 2, and Letter 26 discusses what the various Christian communities of the Middle East agree on doctrinally and where they differ. Letter 26 also includes a fascinating discussion of the primacy of various Christian episcopal sees, arguing that Seleucia-Ctesiphon should be seen as having preeminence over the other four great sees of the church.

Through Timothy's letters, one can glimpse the culture of study, translation, and interest in manuscripts that existed among Syriac-speaking Christian intellectuals at the height of the Abbasid period.[40] In a number of letters (e.g., Letters 24, 30, 31, 33, 37, 39, 43, 47, 49, 54), for example, Timothy asks his correspondent to send him copies of certain texts, to seek out specific translations

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36 Young, *Patriarch, Shah and Caliph*, pp. 85–99, shows the usefulness of the letters for understanding intra-Christian relations, seventh-century church politics, relations with the ruling Arabs and Ishoʿyabh's connections with the wider world, as far as China. Brock, "Syriac Writers from Beth Qatraye", pp. 85–87, discusses Ishoʿyahb and Beth Qatraye. More recently, Ioan, *Muslime und Araber bei Īšōʿjahb III*, pp. 89–122, discusses the importance of Ishoʿyahb's letters for understanding the early period of Muslim rule. More succinctly, Teule, "Ishoʿyabh III of Adiabene", provides a convenient summary of the information from Ishoʿdad's letters that touches on Christian-Muslim relations.

37 Letters 1–39, ed. Braun; Letter 40, ed. Cheikho; Letter 41, ed. Bidawid (includes also summaries of the contents of all of Timothy's letters); Letters 42–58, ed. Heimgartner; Letter 59, ed. Heimgartner. Heimgartner/Roggema, "Timothy I", provide perhaps the most convenient overview of the various editions and translations of Timothy's letters.

38 See the tally of translators, by Christian confession, in Troupeau, "Le rôle des syriaques", p. 4.

39 All extant manuscripts are ultimately based on Baghdad Chaldean Monastery 509. See Haddad/Isaac, *Syriac and Arabic Manuscripts*, p. 228 and Timothy I, Letters 42–58, ed. Heimgartner, pp. IX–X. For ʿAbdishoʿ's knowledge of 200 letters, see Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3.1, p. 163.

40 Brock, "Two Letters of the Patriarch Timothy", is an excellent example of this point.

of other texts, to ask at Miaphysite monasteries about the availability of texts, or comments about texts and translations. In one particular letter, (Letter 47), Timothy offers a quite detailed description of the process and challenges of having copies made of the Syro-Hexapla, a seventh-century Miaphysite translation of the Greek Old Testament into Syriac. Timothy also relates that some 10 years previous, an Arab had discovered a cave near Jericho which was filled with Hebrew manuscripts, containing both Biblical and non-Biblical books.[41]

Timothy presided over what was perhaps the largest Christian body in the world of his day, if not in terms of numbers then definitely in geographical extent, and his letters reflect the global nature of his church's reach. Writing to the monks of Beth Maron at the end of the eighth century, for example, Timothy would refer to the "king of the Turks" and "more or less all of his domain" having "left the ancient error of atheism and become intimates of Christianity" twelve years previously. In the same letter, Timothy would refer to recent mass conversions of Julianists to his church in South Arabia.[42] In his Letter 47, Timothy would mention appointing, or his preparations to appoint, bishops for regions as far afield as Turkestan, Tibet, Rayy, and Balad,[43] and although now lost, we know Timothy wrote letters to Christians in India.[44] As remarkable as the breadth of Timothy's geographical contacts is, he is perhaps most famous for something else: the religious disputation he held with the Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdī, an account of which he provided in a letter to an unnamed correspondent.[45] Less widely known is Timothy's debate with a Muslim Aristotelian at the court of the Caliph, an encounter he described in his Letter 40.[46]

The richness of Timothy's letter collection in Syriac perhaps finds its closest analogue in the rival Miaphysite tradition, not in the collection of a single

41 Letters 42–58, ed. Heimgartner, pp. 79–87; trans. Brock, *Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, pp. 245–50.

42 Letter 41, ed. Bidawid, p. 46*.

43 Letters 42–58, ed. Heimgartner, pp. 86–87; trans. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, pp. 249–50. For discussion of the location of the various bishoprics mentioned at the end of Letter 47, see the annotations to Heimgartner's German translation, ibid., pp. 71–72.

44 For these letters, referred to in the work of Ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043), see Bidawid, *Les lettres du patriarche nestorien Timothée I*, p. 49.

45 Letter 59, ed. and trans. Heimgartner. A facsimile edition of the text, with an English translation, is available in Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies*, vol. 2, pp. 1–162 and also id., "The Apology of Timothy". Heimgartner (p. 1 n. 5) and Mingana (*Woodbrooke Studies*, vol. 2, p. 15, n. 5) both understood the unnamed correspondent in this letter to be Sergius, a figure to whom Timothy addressed a number of letters.

46 Ed. Cheikho. On this encounter, see Griffith, "Patriarch Timothy I", pp. 38–53. For a discussion of Letter 40, as well as Letters 34–36 in the context of Christian-Muslim encounters in the Abbasid period, see id., "The Syriac Letters of Patriarch Timothy I".

figure, but rather in the letters of a group of scholarly churchmen from the seventh and eighth centuries that included Severus Sebokht (d. 667), Athanasius of Balad (d. 684), Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), George, Bishop of the Arab Tribes (d. 724), and John, the Stylite of Litarb (d. after 738).[47] All of these men are either explicitly connected to the monastery of Qenneshre or likely studied there. In the early medieval Middle East, Qenneshre was the most important center of Greco-Syriac bilingualism in the Miaphysite world[48] and to get a sense for the philhellenism of these figures, one need only look at the greetings used in their letters: rather than use the traditional, *shlām*, or "peace", as the salutation at the beginning of their letters, they would typically use *l-meḥdā*, literally, "to rejoice", or another extremely literal Syriac calque on the Greek χαῖρε, χαίρετε or χαίρειν.[49]

Severus Sebokht was not the first philhellenic figure associated with Qenneshre, but he is the first figure associated with the monastery who we know studied Greek philosophical and scientific texts.[50] Severus' extant letters show an interest in precisely these topics. A letter to a periodeute named Yonan, for instance, answers a number of the latter's questions about various terms and points in Aristotle's *Organon*[51] and a letter to a priest named Aitilāhā discusses certain expressions in Aristotle's *On Interpretation*.[52] Severus also corresponded about scientific matters with a periodeute named Basil who lived on Cyprus. Scientific points aside, especially notable in his correspondence with Basil is Severus' harshly critical attitude towards arrogant views that could be found among certain Greek speakers of his day, people who

47 For evidence that these men either studied at Qenneshre or likely were associated with it, see Tannous, "You Are What You Read", pp. 94–95 and id., *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, pp. 171–72. John of Litarb is one author whom I did not suggest had studied at Qenneshre; his association with Jacob of Edessa and George of the Arabs, as well as his similar interests, however, might be taken as evidence that he had a similar intellectual formation, possibly at Qenneshre.

48 See, e.g., the reports in Michael the Syrian (*Chronicle* 11.15, ed. Chabot, vol. 4, p. 444; trans. ibid., vol. 2, p. 470) that Athanasius II studied at Qenneshre in his youth and learned Greek and that Jacob of Edessa studied the Psalms in Greek at Qenneshre.

49 Cf. Brock's comments on George of the Arabs in "From Antagonism to Assimilation", p. 29. All of these men, save John of Litarb, are attested as having used some version of this calque. See further Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, pp. 174–75.

50 On Severus' extant writings, including his translation from Middle Persian into Syriac of Paul the Philosopher's commentary on Aristotle's *On Interpretation*, see Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, pp. 246–47.

51 Severus Sebokht, *Letter to Yonan the Periodeute*, ed. Hugonnard-Roche. For an earlier study of its contents, see Reinink, "Severus Sebokts Brief an den Periodeutes Jonan".

52 The letter is unpublished, but contained in BL Add. 17156, fols. 11a–12. For its description, see Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, vol. 3, p. 1163.

looked down on Aramaic speakers and thought that it was not possible that Syrians might know anything about astronomy. These, Severus pointed out, did not realize that it was the Babylonians who invented astronomy and that the Babylonians were Syrians.[53]

Miaphysite Patriarch Athanasius II of Balad (d. 683/84) was a student of Severus Sebokht.[54] He, too, was a figure with strong interests in Greek philosophy – he translated Porphyry's *Eisagoge* into Syriac, as well as Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Sophistical Refutations*.[55] What has attracted more attention than Athanasius' translations, however, is a letter he wrote to his chorepiscopoi and periodeutes, condemning Christians who were eating pagan sacrifices and Christian women who were marrying pagans. The "pagans" he referred to, *ḥanpē* in Syriac, are not specified to be Muslims in the letter itself, but the title later given to it refers to the group in question as *mhaggrāyē*, or Hagarenes – that is, Muslims, and for this reason, the letter has been taken as a possibly seventh-century reflection on Christian-Muslim relations.[56]

Athanasius was responsible for ordaining Jacob of Edessa as bishop of Edessa.[57] Jacob was perhaps the greatest polymath of the entire West Syrian tradition, rivaled only in the breadth of his learning and interests by Bar Hebraeus in the thirteenth century.[58] Important for this present discussion is Jacob's rich correspondence. All told, some 51 letters or letter fragments of Jacob are extant.[59] These have attracted attention from a number of quarters.

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53 Severus Sebokht, *Letter to Basil the Periodeute*, ed. and trans. Reich. A partial English translation of the letter can be found in Takahashi, "Between Greek and Arabic", pp. 21–23. For the partial publication of Severus's *Reply to the Questions of Basil the Periodeute*, see Nau, "La cosmographie au VIIe siècle", pp. 239–42 and id., "Le traité sur les 'constellations'", p. 337. Severus wrote another reply to Basil's questions, in 665, and the excerpts of this in Paris Syriac 346 are described in Nau, "La cosmographie au VIIe", pp. 242–43.

54 Cf. Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.15, ed. Chabot.

55 For Athanasius' translation of Greek philosophical works into Syriac, see most conveniently, Brock, "The Syriac Commentary Tradition", pp. 4–5.

56 Athanasius II, *Encyclical Letter*, ed. and trans. Ebied. Discussion and further literature can be found in Teule, "Athanasius of Balad" and see Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, p. 124, n. 70 and p. 440, n. 47.

57 See Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.15, ed. Chabot, vol. 4, pp. 444–45; trans. ibid., vol. 2, p. 471.

58 On Jacob's extensive writings, see Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, pp. 248–56.

59 Most of these letters have not been published. For an overview of 50 of Jacob's letters, see van Ginkel, "Greetings to a Virtuous Man", pp. 78–81. The publication history of the letters of Jacob that have been edited is complicated and full treatment of it can be found in Kruisheer's "A Bibliographical Clavis", pp. 282–84. To the 50 letters known to van Ginkel,

Students of the Umayyad period and early Islam have found them interesting in a variety of places: in one letter, Jacob discussed the direction of prayer of Muslims and Jews he saw in Alexandria[60] and in another letter, Jacob attempted to "demonstrate to every Christian or Hagarene [i.e., Muslim] who asks about this that the Virgin Mary, that holy one and God-bearer, is of the seed of David, even if this is not shown forth from the Scriptures."[61] Though it nowhere explicitly mentions Muslims, Michael Cook studied Jacob's Letter 10, to John of Litarb, which deals with the question of whether God has decreed a fixed term to each human's life, in an attempt to understand and contextualize early Muslim debates about predestination.[62]

Christian-Muslim relations are not the only area to which Jacob's letters connect: there is much in Jacob's letters that is of interest to students of the history of Biblical exegesis. To give just one example: Jacob's Letter 13, to John of Litarb, contains material that seems to have been taken from a now-lost work that was potentially based on a source used by *Jubilees*.[63] Jacob's letter writing also dealt with issues of canon law and his responses to canonical questions, together with his canons, provide some of the most vivid material we possess about everyday religious practice in the late seventh and early eighth century Middle East.[64] Taken as a whole, Jacob's letters provide one of the most detailed portraits we have of a Christian scholar and bishop working in Umayyad Syria and, indeed, the entire eastern Mediterranean of the late seventh and early eighth century.

George, Bishop of the Arab Tribes, likely knew Jacob of Edessa. After Jacob died in 708, it was George who completed Jacob's *Hexaemeron*, which was still

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a 51st should now be added, the recently discovered fragments of a previously unknown *Letter to Domeṭ*, written by Jacob (eds. Brock/van Rompay).

60 In his Letter 14, to John of Litarb. For the passage, see BL Add. 12172, fol. 124a. For discussion and translation of this passage, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 565–66. For Jacob going to Alexandria to "gather wisdom", see Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.15, ed. Chabot, vol. 4, p. 445; trans. ibid., vol. 2, p. 471.

61 My translation, from Jacob's Letter 6, to John of Litarb, ed. and trans. Nau, p. 519.

62 See Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, pp. 145–52. This letter is unpublished, but is located in BL Add. 12172, fols. 99a–104a.

63 Ed. Wright; trans. Nau. See Brock, "Abraham and the Ravens". This argument was challenged in Adler's "Jacob of Edessa and the Jewish Pseudepigrapha". Adler then modified his views in "Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Jacob of Edessa's Letters". Adler saw Jacob as drawing upon a lost Greek reworking of *Jubilees*.

64 On Jacob's canons and his correspondence that dealt with canonical matters, see Teule, "Jacob of Edessa and Canon Law". For the picture of interconfessional relations and religious practice Jacob's canons give us, see Tannous, "You are What You Read" and id., *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, pp. 85–110, 134–59.

unfinished at that point.[65] Like Jacob, George was elevated to the episcopacy at the initiative of Athanasius of Balad, who seems to have been George's teacher.[66] Like Jacob, George was also a bilingual polymath and translator.[67] Only 11 of George's letters have survived, but these nevertheless cover a wide variety of topics – astronomy, philosophy, chronology, biblical interpretation, the writings of Gregory Nazianzen, how to deal with night temptations, and more.[68]

As bishop over Christian Arab tribes living under Arab Muslim rule and likely based somewhere in the region of Aleppo, George's letters hold out the possibility of offering some sort of connection between the world of Syriac-speaking Christians and the new Arabic-speaking Muslim conquerors. George's tribes were called in Syriac the Tanukāyē, the Ṭuʿāyē and the ʿAqulāyē; members of these tribes were present at early Christian-Muslim encounters and some of them knew both Arabic and Syriac.[69] Particularly interesting in this regard is that George's first three letters deal with Christological polemic. The form this polemic takes – aporetic questions – is precisely the form of the earliest *kalām* and the milieu of George's bilingual Christian Arab tribes is one potential setting for the transfer of this style of religious disputation into a Muslim context.[70]

Like Jacob of Edessa, George corresponded with John, the Stylite of Litarb.[71] One of George's letters, in fact, is a response to a question from John about

65 See Jacob of Edessa, *Hexaemeron*, ed. Chabot, p. 347 for the note mentioning George's completion of it after Jacob's death. On the date of Jacob's death, see Schrier, "Chronological Problems", p. 77 (which contains information on the dates of important events in the lives of Jacob of Edessa, Athanasius of Balad, George of the Arabs, and others).

66 For this evidence and more, see Tannous, "Between Christology and Kalām?", pp. 674–75.

67 On George, see most conveniently Brock, "Giwargi, bp. of the Arab tribes" and Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, pp. 257–58.

68 *Letters*, trans. Ryssel. The text of only some of these letters has been published: Letter 4, to Joshua the Solitary, ed. de Lagarde; Letters 7 and 9, to John the Stylite of Litarb, ed. and trans. Ryssel. I am preparing an English translation and edition of the letters which I hope to publish eventually.

69 George is twice called Bishop of the Tanūkāyē, the Ṭūʿāyē and the ʿAqūlāyē in BL Add. 12154, on fol. 222a and 245a. For George's tribes present at an early Christian-Muslim religious encounter, see Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.8, ed. Chabot and further Tannous, "Between Christology and Kalām?", pp. 710–11.

70 See Tannous, "Between Christology and Kalām?", which builds on the work of Cook's "The Origins of *Kalām*". Most recently, see Treiger, "Origins of *Kalām*".

71 George's Letters 7–10 (BL Add. 12154, fols. 264b–290a) were all written to John the Stylite of Litarb.

difficulties he had in understanding a letter written by Jacob.[72] In John's one extant letter, written to an Arab priest named Daniel and focusing on the interpretation of Genesis 49:10, he makes a reference to a now-lost letter of George of the Arabs.[73] In other words, Jacob of Edessa, George of the Arabs, and John of Litarb belonged to a circle to which Athanasius of Balad may have also belonged, and this group of men provide a bridge of intellectual activity between the late Roman and early Islamic Middle East that continued across the change in regimes, till nearly the end of the Umayyad period.[74]

There are, of course, many more letters and letter collections that might be discussed in an article on Syriac epistolography. Symbolic, perhaps, of the great amount of work that remains to be done in not only studying, but simply editing and translating, are the letters of David bar Pawlos, a Miaphysite writer of the late eighth or ninth century. Dozens of David's letters have survived to the present, dealing with everything from mathematics to the history of the diacritical point in Syriac, but as yet, they are available only in a rare Middle Eastern edition published in 1953 by Philoxenos Dolabani.[75] What is more, apart from what exists, we should also be mindful of the great amount of Syriac epistolary material that has perished. From the medieval catalog of ʿAbdishoʿ bar Brikha, we know of a number of letter collections of late antique East Syrian authors which are no longer extant – those of Ishoʿyahb I (d. 596),[76] Aba I of Kashkar (fl. late sixth and early seventh century),[77] Abraham bar

72 See BL Add. 12154, fols. 272b–278a (Letter 8) and Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, vol. 2, p. 988. On John, see Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, pp. 258–59.

73 For the reference, see BL Add. 12154, fol. 293b. What remains of John of Litarb's single extant letter – which is fragmentary in the manuscript – can be found on fols. 291a–294b of BL Add. 12 154. The letter is unedited, but I have prepared an edition and English translation of it that I hope to publish eventually.

74 Cf. the comments in Ryssel's translation of George's *Letters*, p. XV and see Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, pp. 203–07.

75 David bar Pawlos, *Letters*, ed. Dolabani. I am grateful to Fr. Roger Akhrass for providing me with a typed version of this publication and sending me images of the original's table of contents before I was eventually able to acquire a photocopy of the entire work. For a brief overview of the contents of David's letters as well as a listing of 61 titles of David's letters, see Vööbus, "Entdeckung des Briefkorpus des Dawid bar Paulos". On David bar Pawlos, see Brock, "Dawid bar Pawlos" (which also contains a brief discussion of his letters) and Baumstark, *Geshichte der Syrischen Literatur*, pp. 272–73.

76 See Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3.1, p. 111. ʿAbdishoʿ mentions "letters' of Ishoʿyahb I", but only one letter of his has been preserved, written to Jacob of Darai, and transmitted in the *Synodicon Orientale* (ed. Chabot, pp. 165–68). For what is known of Ishoʿyahb I's works today, see Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, p. 126.

77 See Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3.1, p. 154 and Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, pp. 123–24.

Qardaḥē (fl. late sixth and early seventh century),[78] Shubalemaran of Seleucia (fl. early seventh century),[79] Shahdost of Tirhan (fl. eighth century),[80] to name only a few.

The disappearance of Syriac letter collections raises a final issue: the Chalcedonian church's use of Syriac for letter writing. Surviving letter collections of works composed originally in Syriac all come from members of either the Syrian Orthodox (i.e., Miaphysite) Church or members of the Church of the East (i.e., East Syrians). And yet, a number of Chalcedonian communities throughout the Middle East used Syriac liturgically into the early modern period.[81] Why did the Chalcedonians not write letters in Syriac, even though they prayed in it? This question is a smaller version of a puzzle confronting the student of Syriac literature: the relative absence of material written originally in Syriac by Chalcedonians.

This chapter is not the place to attempt an answer to the question of what happened to Chalcedonian Syriac works, but it will suffice to point out that Chalcedonians did in fact write letters in Syriac into the period of Arab rule. We know this to have been the case because of a single letter which we have, written by a Miaphysite bishop named Elia. Elia himself had been a Chalcedonian and converted to Miaphysitism and wrote an apologetic letter in the second half of the eighth century to a Chalcedonian friend of his named Leo. In addition to citing, in Syriac, John Damascene's *Fount of Wisdom*, Elia cited Syriac works of otherwise unknown Chalcedonian authors, including letters written perhaps in the late seventh or early eighth century by George of Martyropolis and Constantine of Harran, as well as a letter written by Leo of Harran, Elia's Chalcedonian correspondent.[82] These fragments of letters, preserved by

78 See Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3.1, p. 224 and Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, p. 127.

79 See Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3.1, p. 189 and Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, p. 133.

80 See Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3.1, p. 177 and Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, p. 215.

81 Charon, *History of the Melkite Patriarchates*, pp. 152–61 gives an overview of the use and knowledge of Greek, Syriac, and Arabic among Chalcedonians in Syria and Palestine up till the early twentieth century that remains useful. The list provided by Brock, "Syriac on Sinai", pp. 112–16, of dated manuscripts from the eighth to thirteenth centuries held in the library at St. Catherine's (or formerly held there), with their place of origin, when known, is helpful for getting a sense for Chalcedonian communities where Syriac was used.

82 Elia, *Letter to Leo*, ed. and trans. van Roey. For the fragments of George of Martyropolis, Constantine of Harran, and Leo of Harran, see van Roey, "Trois auteurs chalcédoniens syriens".

Miaphysites and not Chalcedonians themselves, point to a now-lost world of Chalcedonian Syriac letter writing.

3 Conclusion

In the short space I have been allotted, I have tried to give a very basic sense for the treasures that await those who study the rich subject of Syriac epistolography. I have, however, only been able to scratch the surface of a very large and essentially unexplored topic, one that awaits deep study and proper analysis. Literary studies of Syriac letter writing are non-existent[83] and as yet, no full bibliographic accounting of what exists and what we know to have existed has been undertaken. There are, furthermore, a host of other important and unexplored questions that await investigation: the influence of Greek letter writing on Syriac letter writing, changes in the nature of Syriac letter writing over time, and the nature of the collection, use, and transmission of Syriac letters, to name only three. None of these tasks is an easy one, but it is precisely the great amount of work that remains to be done on Syriac letters that makes it an especially exciting subject; for despite the great loss that Syriac letter collections have experienced over the past millennium, there nevertheless survives a rich amount of epistolary material which can provide precious points of comparison for students of Byzantine epistolography and, moreover, expand our knowledge of the cultural and religious history of the Middle East.

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83 Riad, *Studies in the Syriac Preface* contains a number of references to letters as well as analysis that includes discussion of Syriac letters.

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CHAPTER 3

Letter Collections in the Latin West

Lena Wahlgren-Smith

1 Introduction

Towards the end of the twelfth century the Paris-educated monk William (*c*.1125–1203) found himself far from home, caught up in the religious and political difficulties of a remote Scandinavian country.[1] As subprior of Sainte-Geneviève-du-Mond he had been recruited in the 1160s by the Danish bishop Absalon to reform the canonry of St. Thomas at Eskilsoe, which he later moved to Aebelholt and dedicated to the Paraclete. His labors for monastic reform and the forging of links between Denmark and his home country were interrupted by a political scandal: in 1193, the French king Philip Augustus repudiated his new wife, the Danish princess Ingeborg, the day after their wedding on grounds of alleged consanguinity. William of Aebelholt set hard to work producing a genealogy of the princess to refute the allegations, looking up conjugal law to argue the case, writing to Rome on behalf of the Danish court and comforting the princess.[2]

Some time after this matter, William produced a collection of his choicest letters. It was dedicated not to a single patron, as was customary, but to any "reader of these works" (*lectori carminum horum*).[3] This work survives in a fragmentary form, comprising around two-thirds of the original collection; however, a medieval index gives information on missing letters. It contains a great number of letters on canon law, some but not all specifically about conjugal law and consanguinity. But there are also letters on monastic matters, letters of pastoral advice and letters of recommendation. William himself states in his preface that he has put this collection together for the benefit of unlearned readers who need instruction, presumably in the art of letter-writing. It is not clear how many of these letters are authentic, i.e., letters that have actually been written for sending. William himself explains that he has sometimes put

1 For the life of William, see Damsholt, "Abbed Vilhelms af Æbelholts brevsamling"; ead., "Abbot William of Æbelholt"; Boserup, "A French-Danish Letter"; id., "Abbed Vilhelm søger råd hos pave Cølestin".

2 William of Aebelholt, *Letters*, I, nos. 30–35, eds. Christensen/Nielsen/Weibull, pp. 473–81.

3 William of Aebelholt, *Letters*, Preface, eds. Christensen/Nielsen/Weibull, pp. 429–30. It is not clear why he refers to his letters as *carmina*, "poems".

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the names of eminent people to letters in order to give them greater authority. On the other hand, the reply to one letter survives in the collection of Stephen of Orléans (Tournai), showing that this letter, at least, was sent.[4]

What is certain, in any case, is that William, in composing and eventually assembling his letters, is consciously taking part in a tradition. The eleventh and twelfth centuries have come to be known as the Golden Age of western epistolography. Letters were avidly collected, arranged and disseminated. The ability to compose elegant letters could confer glory and advancement on an otherwise obscure minor cleric. It is estimated that the products of some 200 letter writers are still extant, but references in the surviving texts suggest that this is the tip of the iceberg.[5]

Naturally, people had both written and read letters before this. Constable, in his work on medieval Latin epistolography, divides the evolution of the genre into four main eras: Late Antiquity, the Carolingian Age, the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, and, finally, the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance.[6] Many of the great letter writers of Antiquity and Late Antiquity were still read and emulated during the High Middle Ages. When it comes to later influence, Seneca in particular stands out among the Classical writers, and Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory the Great, and Sidonius Apollinaris among the writers of Late Antiquity.[7]

Carolingian letter writers are fewer and less diverse than those of the later Middle Ages, but include such names as Alcuin, Rabanus Maurus, and Lupus of Ferrierès. The genre suffers a dip in the tenth century, with the exception of the learned bishop Ratherius of Verona, but suddenly springs out in full bloom around the year 1000. By the mid-1100s letter collections were circulating through Europe and a whole supporting genre of *artes dictaminis*, manuals in the art of letter-writing, had sprung up beside them.[8] In the following, I will provide an outline of the most important collections of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, followed by a brief overview of late Medieval and Renaissance collections.

4 Damsholt, "Abbed Vilhelm af Æbelholts brevsamling", p. 6; Stephen of Orléans, *Letters*, no. 145, ed. Desilve, p. 169.

5 Niskanen, *The Letter Collections of Anselm of Canterbury*, p. 64. For introductions to the genre, see also Constable, *Letters and Letter Collections*; id., *Letters of Peter the Venerable*; Haseldine, "Epistolography"; Leclercq, "Le genre épistolaire au moyen âge"; Cotts, *The Clerical Dilemma*, pp. 49–95.

6 Constable, *Letters and Letter Collections*, pp. 27–39.

7 I am becoming less convinced of the influence of Pliny the Younger on medieval letter writers, though his name has often been mentioned in this context.

8 For the *ars dictaminis*, see Murphy, *Medieval Rhetoric* and Rockinger, *Briefsteller und Formelbücher*; also, Witt, "The Arts of Letter-Writing".

2 The "Golden Age" of Letter-Writing: Collections in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries

Gerbert of Aurillac (*c.*946–1003) has been described by Giles Constable as the author who ushered in the Golden Age of western medieval letter-writing.[9] Having been given the opportunity, as a young monk from Aurillac, to accompany the count of Barcelona to Spain where he studied mathematics and natural sciences under Arab teachers, Gerbert was instrumental in introducing Arab learning to the West. On his return he studied and taught at the cathedral school of Reims, with a brief absence as abbot of Bobbio in the early 980s. He was made archbishop of Reims in 991 and elected pope (Sylvester II) in 999. Gerbert was an active reformer, fighting against simony and clerical concubinage. He was also deeply involved in politics, helping to raise Hugh Capet to the French throne and protecting the interests of the young Emperor Otto III. The earliest letters in the collection stem from his time at Bobbio, but otherwise the collection mainly represents his second period at Reims as teacher and archbishop; a few letters from his time as pope are preserved outside the collection.[10]

Gerbert's collection of just over 200 letters shows a selection very similar to that which will often be found in later letter collections: there are letters on public business, letters of pastoral advice, letters of request or offering friendship. Reflecting the author's learned interests, it also contains an unusually high number of requests for books and even a letter on mathematics.[11] There is a high proportion of letters written in the name of others, especially from the period before Gerbert became archbishop. The letters themselves are typically short, sometimes merely unadorned business notes, but more often written in a compact pointed style which is reminiscent of Pliny or Seneca.[12]

The next great letter writer, Fulbert of Chartres (952/62–1028), was educated at Reims under Gerbert. In 1006 he was elected bishop of Chartres, a post he was to retain until his death. A good deal of his time was taken up by episcopal business, not least the need to raise funds and organize the restoration of Chartres cathedral after the disastrous fire of 1020. His letters were collected

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9 Constable, *Letters and Letter Collections*, p. 31.

10 For a brief biography, see the introduction in Gerbert of Aurillac, *Letters*, ed. Weigle, pp. 1–8.

11 Gerbert of Aurillac, *Letters*, no. 134, ed. Weigle, pp. 161–62; eds. and trans. Riché/Callu, pp. 328–31.

12 For a discussion on the application of the three styles of Cicero to medieval epistolography, see Von Moos, *Hildebert von Lavardin*, pp. 46–50; for the pointed and elevated style, see Martin, "Classicism and Style", pp. 541–47.

by his disciples Hildegar and Sigo; they form part of a larger collection which also contains poems, sermons, liturgical compositions and letters by Hildegar.[13] The evidence of the manuscripts suggests that the letters were preserved in groups, probably corresponding to quires or separate sheets; in the manuscript tradition these groups are sometimes rearranged, but their internal order remains intact.

The collection is very mixed: the letters range from brief notes and practical business documents to longer tracts on theology and canon law. It is clear that Fulbert was highly regarded and consulted as an authority on questions requiring learning. Letter 125 is in response to a query by King Robert the Pious regarding the significance of a rain of blood which has recently fallen over part of his kingdom: Fulbert in his reply mentions that there are relevant passages in Livy, Valerius Maximus, and Orosius, but prefers to rely on the testimony of Gregory of Tours.[14] His letter to William of Aquitaine on the obligations of a vassal towards his lord is often cited in discussions on feudal history, though modern scholars may find it frustratingly vague.[15]

One of the most readable letter collections of the Middle Ages, if not of all times, is that of Peter Damian (*c.*1007–1072), prior of Fonte Avellana and eventually cardinal bishop of Ostia. Born in Ravenna, he studied there and taught for a few years, then entered the religious life in Fonte Avellana in 1035 where he became prior in 1043.[16] By this time he had already acquired a reputation for learning and teaching. He was made cardinal bishop of Ostia *c.*1057 and increasingly spent time in Rome on papal business. He was also engaged in enforcing papal authority in Milan after the conflicts between the reforming *patarini* and the archbishop, in mediating between the bishop of Florence and the monks of Vallombrosa and in solving the city of Ravenna from excommunication for supporting the anti-pope Cadalus (Honorius II).

The various versions of Damian's letter collection, according to his editor, have been put together by his disciples and friends shortly after his death; as with Fulbert's collection this is likely to have been done from draft notes of the originals tied together in groups.[17] In total, 181 are preserved, stretching over a period of some 30 years. Some deal with Damian's political and pastoral duties, but a good many are answers to moral and theological queries, the most famous being the letter to abbot Desiderius of Montecassino on whether the

13 See the introduction in Fulbert of Chartres, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Behrends, pp. xxxviii–xxxix. The introduction also provides a brief biography of Fulbert.
14 Fulbert of Chartres, *Letters*, no. 125, ed. and trans. Behrends, p. 224.
15 Fulbert of Chartres, *Letters*, no. 51, ed. and trans. Behrends, pp. 90–93.
16 For Peter's life, see the introduction in Peter Damian, *Letters*, ed. Reindel, vol. 1, pp. 1–13.
17 Ibid., pp. 13–31.

omnipotence of God means that He can make that which is done undone.[18] Another interesting query, if possibly less profound, is that of Pope Alexander which Peter answers in Letter 108: Why do popes die so soon after their elevation when bishops and archbishops can seemingly go on forever?[19]

Peter Damian's distinguishing marks, apart from the sheer intellectual vigor, are the directness and the vividness of his narrative, drawing examples from his own life, with an unusual openness about his own experiences and feelings. When warning a cleric to fulfil his vow, made in a moment of fear of death, to enter religion, he does not only have recourse to the usual quotations or cautionary tales from the fathers, or make a brief allusion to a case from personal experience. Instead he gives detailed accounts of several unrepentant sinners known to himself, including a cleric he knew in his youth who perished in a fire, having lived openly with his concubine for many years.[20] He describes the couple in detail: their appearance, the sound of the man's voice when singing in church, their blushes and laughter and flirtatious glancing at each other. The very vividness of the detail brings out the horror of the fate that overtook the lovers. He is also very open, down to the smallest detail, about his own weaknesses and reactions. In Letter 138 he asks his brother to pray for him to overcome his sins, especially the sin of "scurrilitas", by which he understands his own tendency to become drawn too far into frivolous conversations in his desire to get on with his fellow hermits.[21]

The late eleventh century and early twelfth century see a number of great episcopal collections centred on the Anglo-Norman empire and France. Two successive archbishops of Canterbury, both recruited from the abbey of Bec, have left important letter collections. The collection of Lanfranc (*c.*1005–1089) is the smaller of the two, comprising 59 letters and the acts from two councils, all from his time as an archbishop. A native of Pavia, Lanfranc entered the ascetic monastery of Bec *c.*1042 and taught there until he was made abbot of St. Etienne at Caen in 1063 by William the Conqueror, who elevated him to the see of Canterbury seven years later.[22] Lanfranc's letters are mainly concerned with the business of the realm of England and of the church of Canterbury; he corresponds with other English prelates and clerics, but also keeps in touch with his old friends at Bec. They are well-written but unadorned and simple. There is no evidence that Lanfranc himself collected his letters: the editors

18 Peter Damian, *Letter on the Omnipotence of God*, ed. and trans. Cantin.

19 Peter Damian, *Letters*, no. 108, ed. Reindel, vol. 3, pp. 188–200.

20 Peter Damian, *Letters*, no. 70, ed. Reindel, vol. 2, pp. 320–21.

21 Peter Damian, *Letters*, no. 138, ed. Reindel, vol. 3, pp. 472–76.

22 For Lanfranc's life, see Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec* and Cowdrey, *Lanfranc: Scholar, Monk, and Archbishop*.

suggest that the preparation of St. Anselm's collection may have drawn attention to the existence of letters by his predecessor.[23]

Lanfranc's successor Anselm (*c.*1033–1109) is responsible for one of the largest medieval letter collections extant; the modern edition includes 475 items and even the number of medieval manuscripts runs to over 400.[24] His letters date partly from his time as prior and abbot of Bec, partly from his time as archbishop. He succeeded Lanfranc in the see of Canterbury, after four years of vacancy, much against his own wishes. Anselm is known to have collected his own letters on at least two occasions.[25]

The letters cover practical and administrative questions, questions of pastoral support, and letters which are little else but an exchange of expressions of affection. Anselm is chiefly known for his development and propagation of the epistolary friendship ideal. He establishes a fervent language of love and longing, of physical absence and emotional presence which is directly rooted in the Christian experience. The chapter on Anselm's letters in Eileen Sweeney's book on Anselm has the subtitle "Physical Separation and Spiritual Unity" and this expresses a central aspect of Anselm's thought: friendship to him is inseparable from spiritual closeness and spiritual direction. It is expressed in highly emotional, even physical terms.[26]

At roughly the same time, two French bishops provided the Middle Ages with two of its most famous collections. Ivo of Chartres (*c.*1040–1115) is best known as an expert on canon law, but his letter collection, which contains almost 300 letters, also covers political conflicts, spiritual advice and friendly exchanges.[27] As bishop of Chartres, and for a time as representative of the vacant see of Sens, he was involved in the Investiture conflict though not always on the side of enhanced papal intervention. More than 120 manuscripts are extant giving testimony to Ivo's reputation as a writer. His best-known letter, and one that was already famous in the Middle Ages, is his letter to Hugh of Lyons on the discord between *sacerdotium* and *regnum*.[28]

Hildebert of Lavardin (1055–1133) was renowned as one of the greatest poets of his age, as well as admired as an epistolographer.[29] As bishop of Le Mans

23 See the introduction in Lanfranc, *Letters*, eds. and trans. Clover/Gibson, p. 12.

24 An excellent introduction to the letters, together with a thorough analysis of the manuscript situation, is to be found in Niskanen, *The Letter Collections of Anselm of Canterbury*.

25 Ibid., p. 71.

26 Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury*, p. 38. See also McGuire, *Friendship & Community*, pp. 210–28.

27 For an up-to-date introduction and bibliography, see Rolker, *Canon Law*.

28 Ivo of Chartres, *Letters*, no. 60, ed. and trans. Leclerq, pp. 238–55.

29 For a thorough analysis of his collection, see Von Moos, *Hildebert von Lavardin*.

he became closely involved with the English court and a large part of his correspondence is addressed to members of the Anglo-Norman family and their entourage. In particular, a number of letters are addressed to female royals: the two queens of Henry I and the countess Adele of Blois. These ladies are given pastoral advice but are also addressed as rulers, on questions of business. Hildebert's collection covers the full range of registers from the short, pointed sententia type to the "amplified" higher register.[30] His best known letter is the letter of condolence to Henry I after the wreck of the White Ship.[31] His consolation to the bereaved father draws as much on ancient philosophers as on Scripture and he appears to appeal more to the ancient virtues of Constantia and Sapientia than to any hopes for the hereafter. Like other letters by Hildebert, this is filled with Classical allusions rather than direct quotations. He had clearly internalized the Classical texts he read; indeed, his poetry has been mistaken for that of Martial. Like other episcopal letters, the letters of Hildebert's collection deal with a range of pastoral and ecclesiastical problems, but are notable for the high proportion of letters dealing with moral advice to laymen. Hildebert's collection comprises a total of 90 letters collected after his death. His letters became a textbook for the next generation of letter writers.

The next group of letter writers I shall deal with are all members of the monastic reform movement of the first half of the twelfth century. These letter writers take up Anselm's language of friendship and develop it. They cultivate a style of writing which is rich in sound effects: prose rhyme, alternation, alliteration and word play.

The first surviving collection of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) was put together by his secretary Geoffrey of Auxerre during Bernard's own lifetime and probably to some extent under his supervision.[32] Another version was produced shortly before his death, again probably under his supervision.[33] The sum total of his letters, including some which were never collected, amounts to over 500, spanning over a period of some 30 years. During this period, the Cistercian order grew exponentially, with new houses springing up all over Europe. Bernard's international reputation ensured that he was constantly kept on the move, working to resolve the papal schism, to combat heresy, to preach the second crusade. All this required the writing of letters, to organize and supervise, to forge and maintain friendship links with distant communities, and

30 For an analysis of Hildebert's style, see Martin, "Classicism and Style", pp. 547–48.

31 Hildebert of Lavardin, *Letters*, II, no. 12, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 171, cols. 172–78.

32 For the genesis of the collection, see the introduction in Bernard of Clairvaux, *Letters*, eds. Leclercq/Talbot/Rochais, vol. 7.

33 This is the so-called *editio perfecta* on which Leclercq and Rochais based their edition.

to provide spiritual advice and pastoral consolation to his own monks left behind at Clairvaux. The surviving letters are no doubt only a small selection of all the writing that was done by Bernard and in his name by his secretaries over this time. This selection is heavily geared towards the spiritual and pastoral; its focus is the growth and spirituality of the Cistercian order. Friendship and the maintenance of friendship links is a central part in this growth: around one-fifth of the letters can be classed as pure friendship letters. Bernard's letters became immediately popular: they are found in some 400 manuscripts, though only 80 of them contain the whole collection as opposed to smaller extracts.

Bernard's collection swiftly found an imitator at Clairvaux itself. Within a few years of Geoffrey's edition, Bernard's secretary, Nicholas of Clairvaux (*c.*1125–1175/78) put together his first letter collection.[34] Nicholas provides a prologue addressed to two monks of Clairvaux. He claims that he is only putting this collection together following his friends' insistent pleading and that they are in a rude, unfinished state, not worthy to be seen. The collection is a short one, containing only 53 letters in its finished form, and, unlike Bernard's, it only spans over a few years. It has an unusually high proportion of letters written in the name of others, including that of his abbot. Yet Nicholas has chosen to publish them as his own work, suggesting that to him these letters are works of literary composition, not merely records of activity. The letters themselves are written in a style which can best be described as a collage, being so heavily laden with quotations that it is sometimes difficult to find any original text. The language is of the emotive, "sound effect" type typical of the Cistercians. The contents are less international in character and more focused on Clairvaux and its immediate neighborhood than those in St Bernard's collection, which seems natural, given Nicholas' more lowly position. A sizeable proportion of the letters deal with the author's own, highly irregular, transition from the Benedictine monastery of Montiéramey and his attempts to encourage other monks to abandon their monasteries and join the Cistercian order by any means. Presumably Nicholas hoped that these letters would be read as evidence of his zeal for the new religion. He played an important part in maintaining friendship links with other communities: Bernard's friendships with Peter the Venerable and Peter of Celle were primarily conducted through Nicholas. This Cistercian honeymoon was not to last: in 1152 or thereabouts Nicholas was thrown out of Clairvaux by St Bernard, accused of plagiarism and

34 For Nicholas' collections see my recent edition: Nicholas of Clairvaux, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Wahlgren-Smith. This contains an introduction to Nicholas' life; see also Constable, *Letters of Peter the Venerable*, pp. 316–30 and Benton, "The Court of Champagne as a Literary Centre".

forgery. Thanks to supportive friends at the curia he managed to stage a comeback into the Benedictine order, where he ended up as prior of a Benedictine house in Troyes.

After his departure from Clairvaux, he prepared a second letter collection dedicated to his new literary patron Henry of Champagne. This in its surviving form is very short, comprising only five letters and fragments of a further five, but the prologue shows that a collection was indeed intended, though we cannot know if these letters were all it was to contain. It is very different from his first collection, being far more worldly in character: instead of tearful protestations of monastic *amicitia*, we find jocular requests for wine and letters of thanks to secular patrons.

Both Bernard and Nicholas corresponded with two more of the great monastic letter writers of the age: Peter the Venerable and Peter of Celle. Peter the Venerable (*c.*1092–1156), abbot of Cluny, like St Bernard, was both an international figure and an indefatigable reformer of his own order.[35] Unlike Bernard, he was also a man who managed to keep on friendly terms with almost anybody he came across: he was a close friend of Bernard's and gave a home to Abelard. His letters are addressed to other abbots and members of monastic communities, to bishops and secular clerics, to successive popes and a few to more distant recipients such as the king of Sicily and the patriarch of Jerusalem. They are of varying lengths, some of them very long, like the famous letter to Bernard in defence of the Cluniac order,[36] some more reminiscent of the brief pointed style. Peter's letter collection in its most complete state comprises 193 letters and 3 treatises.[37] Constable concludes that Peter himself chose which letters were to be preserved for the collection, probably with the aid of his secretary Peter of Poitiers.[38] Peter also revised his own letters, both before the initial publication and for later editions; these revisions are usually in the form of small stylistic changes.[39] Peter's letters reveal him as an ardent friend, anxious not to lose touch with the people who have come to mean something to him. His letters to Heloise as abbess of Paraclete are typical of his manner: gentle, respectful and with real psychological insight. Clearly designed to appeal to her pride in her former lover, his first letter also reassures her on a subject that may well have needed some reassurance: that

35 Constable, *Letters of Peter the Venerable* provides one of the best introductions available to letter-writing in general, and to any medieval writer.

36 Peter the Venerable, *Letters*, no. 28, ed. Constable, pp. 52–101.

37 The latter not included in Constable's edition.

38 Constable, *Letters of Peter the Venerable*, p. 80.

39 Ibid., p. 41.

Abelard had been able to overcome his restless arrogance and find peace in his last hour.[40]

Peter, abbot of Montier-la-Celle (*c.*1115–1183) was another member of the same monastic circle, exchanging letters and visits. His letters are concerned with similar subjects to those of Peter the Venerable, though perhaps tending slightly more towards the local. They deal with difficulties within Peter's own abbey and sustain friendships with other communities, particularly with the Carthusian order to which Peter had strong links. Peter of Celle's letters are not the most easily accessible of epistolary literature: they are couched in heavily biblical language and often allude, rather cryptically, to shared knowledge or in-jokes. At the same time, they are full of gentle irony and wit. Peter of Celle is one of the few medieval epistolographers who regularly sends himself up. One of the best exchanges in this vein is perhaps the theological exchange between Peter and Nicholas of Clairvaux, where Nicholas attempts an exposé on the nature of God, the body and the soul, and soon gets out of his depth, while Peter gently pulls his leg at the same time as trying to make it clear to him that his speculations verge on the heretical.[41] Peter's letters were originally preserved in two separate collections, one earlier containing letters from his time as abbot of Celle, one containing letters from his later time as abbot of Saint-Remi.[42] The first of these collections was arranged according to the rank of the recipient and according to his editor may well have been compiled by Peter himself; the second has no discernible order and may well have been taken from the monastic archive without input from the author.[43]

Having discussed St Bernard and his circle at some length it seems only fair to devote a few lines to Bernard's famous adversary, Peter Abelard. It is often overlooked that the *Historia Calamitatum*, the famous account of Abelard's life and misfortunes, is, in fact, in letter form. In the manuscripts this is followed by an exchange of letters in the names of Abelard and Heloise, starting with a letter in which Heloise, now abbess of Paraclete, laments her loneliness and inability to find peace without her lover. Abelard's reply neatly sidesteps the

40 Peter the Venerable, *Letters*, no. 115, ed. Constable, pp. 303–08; see also, e.g., the *Letters*, nos. 5–7 to Hato of Troyes, ed. Constable, pp. 9–14.

41 *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 202, cols. 491–513; Peter's letters also in Peter of Celle, *Letters*, ed. Haseldine, pp. 204–35 with the editor's notes at pp. 706–11 for an explanation of the theological tradition underlying this argument. For further information on Peter, see Haseldine's introduction and his article "The Creation of a Literary Memorial".

42 See the introduction in Peter of Celle, *Letters*, ed. Haseldine, pp. xxxiv–xxxvi. There are no letters that can be shown to stem from the latest period of Peter's life, when he was bishop of Chartres.

43 Ibid., p. xlv. Two further editions are also extant, one possibly representing letters brought to England by John of Salisbury (Ibid., p. xliii).

request for emotional reassurance and delivers a little homily on the subject of prayer. The next letter, in the name of Heloise, speaks with startling openness of her discontent and sexual frustration. Abelard responds with more religious side-stepping and Heloise eventually resigns and falls in with her former lover's tone.[44] This exchange has occasioned a great deal of discussion by the learned community. Various interpretations have been suggested: the two most popular being either that it is a genuine exchange or that one of the former lovers wrote both sides of the exchange.[45]

If these letters have led to controversy, this is nothing compared to the controversy attached to another group of letters which has also been associated with the love story of Abelard and Heloise. The *Epistolae duorum amantium* derive from a manuscript found at Clairvaux in 1471 by the librarian Johannes de Vepria. The collection consists of 113 brief letters (partly in the form of extracts) and poems, in the form of a passionate exchange between a male and a female part. These do not share the variety of subject matter found in most contemporary collections; they are declarations of love and very little else. The woman speaks of her lover as her teacher and describes him as steeped in both philosophy and poetry.[46] Könsgen, who published this correspondence, tentatively linked it to the names of Abelard and Heloise. His suggestion was taken up strongly by Constant Mews who published a translation and introduction to the letters in 1999.[47]

These are not the only love letters preserved from the twelfth century. The late twelfth-century *Tegernsee collection* contains, amongst other things, a small collection of letters addressed by women to male lovers, by women to other women and one letter from a man to a woman.[48] It is not quite clear what these letters are or where they come from. In the manuscript they follow immediately after the *ars dictaminis* of Adalbert Samaritanus and there can be no doubt that their function in this manuscript is as model letters. This

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44 For a recent critical edition and translation of these letters see Heloise and Peter Abelard, *Letters*, ed. Luscombe, trans. Radice.

45 There is a vast literature on the authenticity of these letters. Luscombe, the latest editor, takes the view that the correspondence does represent genuine letters by Abelard and Heloise, though these may well have been revised by one or both of them for inclusion in the collection (Heloise and Peter Abelard, *Letters*, ed. Luscombe, trans. Radice, pp. xxviii–xxix). For further reading, see Dronke, *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe*, pp. 323–42 and *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, pp. 107–39; also, Newman, "Authority, Authenticity and the Repression of Heloise" and Luscombe, "From Paradise to Paraclete".

46 *Epistolae duorum amantium* 49, 112, ed. Könsgen, pp. 25–28, 60–61.

47 Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard*.

48 *Tegernseer Briefsammlung*, eds. Plechl/Bergmann, pp. ix–xvi.

does not, however, tell us anything about the genesis of the letters, whether they were authentic letters which had been included as models or letters composed specifically for the collection. Fictitious letters are not at all uncommon in this period.[49]

At the same time as Geoffrey of Auxerre was arranging St Bernard's letters and Nicholas of Clairvaux was preparing his imitation of this work, a very different letter collection was being put together in Germany. The letter collection of Abbot Wibald of Stablo and Corvey (1098–1158) has been described as a portable document file.[50] It is not a literary monument assembled by its author, nor a selection of the best letters made by admiring disciples after the writer's death; instead it is a register which served a practical purpose in monastic administration and rule. Wibald entered the Benedictine order at the age of 19 and became abbot of Stablo in 1130; in 1147 he also became abbot of Corvey, which was in difficulties due to the deposition of its abbot followed by the untimely death of his successor. For the rest of his life Wibald divided his attention between the two monasteries. He also served as counsellor to the Emperor Lothar III and King Conrad III. During the reign of Frederick Barbarossa, Wibald was employed as a link between the German Empire and Byzantium and sent on missions to Constantinople in 1155 and 1157; he died in Monastir on his way back from this second embassy.

The manuscript preserved is the autograph of Wibald's collection. It was started around the time of the author's accession to Corvey and ends just before its author's death in 1157. Though it does not contain every single letter written by and to Wibald during these years, it still contains far more letters than the average selective collection: 451 covering a period of only 10 years.[51] This sheer quantity is what sets it apart from other collections. It is very common in medieval letter collections to find a small group of letters illustrating one particular problem or situation. Thus there is a group of five letters in Nicholas of Clairvaux' collection concerning the dispute between the bishop of Saint Malo and the monks of Marmoutier and a similar small group in the collection of Peter of Blois dealing with the rebellion of Henry the Young King. But usually these are letters that tell a chronological narrative or illustrate the problem from different angles, each letter providing something new. Wibald's non-selective approach means that *every* letter occasioned by one particular situation may be included. At the very beginning of the collection there are

49 For this epistolary subgenre, see Constable, "Forged Letters in the Middle Ages"; Döring, "Wir Machomet"; Schaller, "Scherz und Ernst".

50 "Eine Art leicht tragbaren Aktenordner" (Reuter, "Gedenküberlieferung", p. 162).

51 Wibald of Stablo, *Letters*, eds. Hartmann/Zatschek/Reuter, vol. 1, p. xxxiiii.

a number of letters, written in the spring of 1147 in the name of various senders, informing the pope and the papal chancellor of Wibald's election as abbot of Corvey and asking for the return of the alienated houses of Fischbeck and Kemnade.[52] By the end of the same year, Wibald renewed the abbey's claims to these properties and the register contains no less than seven very similar letters from various senders asking for papal confirmation of his claims, followed by the pope's reply.[53] A more selective letter collection, aimed at entertainment or literary display, might have contained one of those supportive letters and the pope's response: Wibald's purposes require the inclusion of the full documentation.

Another German letter writer provides a rather unusual take on the letter form itself. The letters of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), abbess of Rupertsberg, do not follow the standard formulas for medieval letters at all.[54] There is no carefully graded salutation, no exordium to capture the goodwill of the reader and prepare him for the final petition. Instead she often starts her letters with an exclamation: "O persona" ("O person"), "O tu" ("O you") or else dives straight into her vision: "I saw these words in a true vision." Sometimes the letters follow a two-part structure, with the vision and then Hildegard's explanation,[55] sometimes the words of the vision make up the whole letter.[56] The letters themselves occasionally address the ordinary concerns of the head of a religious house, such as the advice given to an abbess worried about the suitability of the convent priest[57] or the problems arising from the burial of an excommunicated man in the cemetery of Hildegard's convent.[58] But a great many of them are of a kind with which the average abbess would not be dealing: answering letters from popes, archbishops, and other dignitaries who wanted their moral and spiritual problems addressed through her revelations. And this is surely the reason behind the unusual format of her letters. It can hardly be simply because of her unlettered upbringing. The collection

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52 Wibald of Stablo, *Letters*, nos. 4, 6, 7, 9, eds. Hartmann/Zatschek/Reuter, vol. 1, pp. 7–8, 11–17, 18–19.

53 Wibald of Stablo, *Letters*, nos. 46–53, eds. Hartmann/Zatschek/Reuter, vol. 1, pp. 80–92.

54 For a discussion of the transmission and the possibility of authorial revision, see L. Van Acker, "Der Briefwechsel"; for the parts of the medieval letter, see Constable, *Letter and Letter Collections*, pp. 16–17.

55 E.g., Hildegard von Bingen, *Letters*, no. 17, ed. Van Acker, vol. 1, pp. 51–52.

56 E.g., Hildegard von Bingen, *Letters*, no. 19, ed. Van Acker, vol. 1, p. 55.

57 Hildegard von Bingen, *Letters*, no. 268, ed. Van Acker, vol. 3, pp. 18–19.

58 Hildegard von Bingen, *Letters*, nos. 23–24, ed. Van Acker, vol. 1, pp. 61–68. This dispute, which led to Rupertsberg being placed under an interdict, formed the occasion for Hildegard's Letter 23, which elaborates on the role of music in restoring the souls of the elect to their original state of enjoyment.

incorporates a number of letters from other abbesses and religious women, and these all conform to contemporary expectations as to what a letter should look like. Hildegard's letters offer something different: these are words straight from the mouth of God through the medium of his visionary and they are couched in the language of revelation rather than that of epistolography.

The next generation of letter writers contains some well-known members of the secular clergy. John of Salisbury, the companion and friend of Thomas Becket, made two collections of his letters.[59] The first consisted of letters written during the life-time of his patron Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury. This is probably the collection sent by John to Peter of Celle.[60] Less than a third of the letters are written in John's own name; the majority are in the name of the archbishop. The second collection stems from the time of the Becket conflict.

The translator of Arnulf of Lisieux' collection calls his first edition of his letters a "little book of exempla", adding the subtitle "a handbook for letter writers".[61] During his 40 odd years as bishop of Lisieux, he was closely involved with the political affairs of the Angevin empire, supporting Henry Plantagenet in his claim to the throne, attempting to mediate in the Becket affair, supporting Henry as king against the rebellion of his eldest son. His letters reflect his political and ecclesiastical involvement as well as his pastoral role. Arnulf writes in a style which can seem rhetorical and labored, but he is also capable of clear exposition and a lively narrative; see for instance, his account of the scandalous conditions at the monastery of Grestain.[62] Arnulf collected his own letters and provided them with a prologue. Carolyn Scriber has distinguished four different versions of the collection, the first being the one published by Arnulf in 1166. Arnulf himself revised his collection at least once.[63] The letters of the first edition are grouped by subject matter and often arranged so as to provide a contrast to one another: thus, for instance, a letter about a young man who is neglecting his studies is immediately followed by a letter about a commendable young man who is making the most of his time at court, a letter containing sincere wishes for the recovery of a sick friend is juxtaposed to

59 For an analysis of the tradition, see the introduction to John of Salisbury, *Letters,* eds. Millor/Butler/Butler/Brooke.

60 Peter of Celle, *Letters*, no. 70, ed. Haseldine, p. 322 with the editor's comments at pp. 716–18 (reproducing a statement by Christopher Brooke).

61 Arnulf of Lisieux, *Letters*, trans. Scriber, p. 19.

62 This is the monastery where the kitchen boy had his neck severed for daring to mutter about the frequent visits of a monk to his wife: Arnulf of Lisieux, *Letters*, nos. 46–49, ed. Barlow, pp. 81–90; trans. Scriber, pp. 89–90, 107–10, 133–34, 198–207.

63 Arnulf of Lisieux, *Letters*, trans. Scriber, pp. 5–15. It is not clear from Scriber's account whether this also involved a textual revision of the letters.

a letter joking about the incompetence of doctors.[64] The prologue makes use of the standard topos that the author is only publishing his work following the earnest supplication of the dedicatee: Arnulf's expressed concern, like that of Nicholas, is that his letters lack rhetorical elegance (*ne lectorem ieiune macies orationis offendat*).[65]

Arnulf's work on behalf of King Henry during the 1973 rebellion of the Young King brought him into contact with an up and coming young cleric who was to perfect this type of letter collection and become one of the most famous exponents of the art. Peter of Blois (*c.*1135–1211) led a somewhat peripatetic life in his search for ecclesiastical preferment.[66] Having studied at Tours and later at Bologna and Paris, he joined the household of archbishop Rotrou of Rouen, spent a year at the court of King Roger II of Sicily, came back to Rouen, then in the early 1170s moved across the Channel where he found employment in the household of Archbishop Richard of Canterbury and later under Archbishops Baldwin and Hubert. He was made archdeacon of Bath in the early 1180s and round about 1200 became archdeacon of London.[67] Peter put together his first letter collection, containing 90 odd letters and a couple of longer tracts, around 1184. He dedicated it to Henry II of England, with the conventional but perhaps somewhat implausible excuse that the king himself had persuaded him to compile a collection of his letters and bring, as it were, different species together into one bundle. If only he had known that this was going to happen a more diligent file and more careful vigilance (*lima diligentior et exquisitior vigilantia*) would have corrected whatever might have offended fastidious ears, instead of which he has to present them to the king in their original state of unrefinement (*nativa ruditate*).[68]

Some 20 years later he went through it and revised it thoroughly, adding letters and partially rewriting old ones. Some of the changes were purely stylistic, others involved rewriting the narrative to fit changing personal and political circumstances. Thus, flattering descriptions of Henry II were withdrawn in a later recension of the collection produced at a time when Henry was already

64 Arnulf of Lisieux, *Letters*, nos. 22, 15, 11, 30, ed. Barlow pp. 29, 20–21, 15–16, 50–51; trans. Scriber, pp. 35–39, 23–27.

65 Arnulf of Lisieux, *Letters*, no. 1, ed. Barlow, p. 1; trans. Scriber, pp. 20–21.

66 The excellent biography by Cotts, *The Clerical Dilemma*, also provides a general introduction to the clerical milieu of so many of the medieval epistolographers.

67 Cotts, *The Clerical Dilemma*, pp. 19–48.

68 Peter of Blois, *Letters*, no. 1, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 207, cols. 1–3.

dead.[69] A number of later, uncollected letters also survive.[70] His prologue, like Arnulf's, stresses the diversity of the contents and worries in case they should not prove sufficiently polished.[71] Like Arnulf, he pays great attention to variety and uses the placing of letters in the collection to provide contrast. In Letter 54 he pleads with the archdeacon of Poitiers not to force his niece Adelitia to become a nun, using matrimonial law to argue that a forced marriage cannot be legal and that the marriage to the Almighty should be no different. Letter 55 is a letter of congratulation to Adelitia commending her wise decision to take the veil.[72] Contrasting letters are not always placed side by side in Peter's collection: the famous letters on the horrors of the courtier's life, Letter 14, and its foil, Letter 150, where Peter withdraws his strictures are not found next to one another in the oldest manuscripts,[73] nor are the two letters where he first refuses ordination into the priesthood (Letter 123) and then asks for the prayers of the monks of Cîteaux on his forthcoming ordination (Letter 139).[74] But the reader can still appreciate the contrast.

This conceit of two letters arguing different sides of the same question is typical of Peter more than of any letter writer I have read. It is, of course, one of the advantages of the letter collection as a genre that questions can be explored from all angles in this fashion. It gives something of the flexibility of a dialogue. And there is no doubt that it suits the personality of a man who always seems to be on the fence, oscillating between pride in his high connections and a sense of having been unfairly sidelined, between eagerness to fulfil his role as a secular cleric and a yearning for the religious life. Peter almost always appears to be on the defensive. Unlike Arnulf or St Bernard, he has no pastoral responsibilities, yet a very high proportion of his letters are pieces of moral advice or rebuke. His admonitions are directed at all ranks of literate society, from archbishops to junior clerics and monks. In the words of John Cotts, "his greatest concern seems to have been with pointing out the faults of others".[75]

69 It is possible that some of the other editions of the collection also stem from Peter's own hand. For an account of the debate surrounding the manuscript tradition, see Cotts, *The Clerical Dilemma*, pp. 269–88; a thorough account of the manuscripts is provided in Higonnet, *Letters of Peter of Blois*. For a discussion of authorial revision, see Wahlgren, *The Letter Collections of Peter of Blois*, pp. 140–44 and 174–79; also Markowski, *Peter of Blois*.

70 Peter of Blois, *Later Letters*, ed. Revell.

71 *Letter*, no. 1, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 207, col. 1.

72 Ibid., cols. 161–68.

73 Ibid., cols. 42–51, 439–42.

74 Ibid., cols. 358–67, 413–16.

75 Cotts, *The Clerical Dilemma*, p. 72.

Unlike Arnulf and Peter who were at the hub of events and mixing with the great men of their day, my next epistolographer, Gui of Bazoches (1145–1203) lived a far more secluded existence.[76] He was brought up by his uncle, bishop Haimon of Chalons-en-Champagne, and attended the cathedral school at Chalons before higher studies in Paris, and later filled the function of cantor at Chalons. His enthusiasm for the cathedral festivals was to get him into trouble when he was elected to present the annual Feast of Fools. From his own letters it is clear that he went badly over budget to a point where he found it wisest to spend some time in exile at a property belonging to one of his uncles. Gui's letter collection is a somewhat strange one. It does not conform at all to the *varietas* ideal which prescribes a mixture of long and short letters, with official and private correspondence side by side. Instead all his letters are of a more or less uniform length, they are all composed in a somewhat heavy recherché style, with recondite words and a plethora of rhetorical effects. Janet Martin describes Gui's letters as "the extreme of twelfth century manneristic prose style" and "rhetorical art at its most flamboyant".[77] The contents of the letters are also unusual: there is nothing that could reasonably be classed as a business letter; instead each letter forms a little essay. It seems clear, despite the fragmentary state of part of the collection, that each letter was meant to end with a poem, most of which are still extant.

The best known of Gui's letters is his description of Paris, where he spent some time as a student.[78] Another equally typical letter is addressed to Gui's mother. He states that she asked him to give an account of his income, house and his daily routine and this he now intends to do. His income is modest and has led to some awkward questioning both from his detractors and from his friends. His house is not distinguished by tall buildings or extensive walls, though one part of the house does stick up above the rest to afford him a view of the town and the beautiful meadows, blue rivers, verdant vineyards and leafy groves beyond. Inside the house, whitewashed walls give the effect of Parian marble and glass windows open on a small garden, while birdsong inside the house gives the impression of perpetual spring. The main feature in this pleasant abode is a noble library containing both the philosophers and the incomparable treasures of Holy Scripture. His mother is not to expect overflowing coffers or wardrobes sagging under piles of clothes; his concerns, we are given to understand, are with less transient treasures. This is the philosophical

76 For a brief biography of Gui, see Klein, "Editing the Chronicle of Gui de Bazoches"; for the manuscript, Munk Olsen, "L'édition d'un manuscript d'auteur".

77 Martin, "Classicism and Style", p. 551.

78 Gui of Bazoches, *Letters*, no. 4, ed. Adolfsson, pp. 14–16.

otium represented by the quiet country villa of Pliny or Seneca in a Christian, urban setting.[79]

My final writer, Gerald of Wales, has left two letter collections, the work known as the *Symbolum electorum* and, a decade later, an exchange with his nephew, published under the title *Speculum duorum*. Gerald, the irascible archdeacon and would-be (arch)bishop of St David's in Wales, is best known for his descriptions of Wales and Ireland. The *Symbolum electorum* is an author-gathered collection supplied with a prologue. It contains four sections, the first being letters, the second poems, the third prologues, and the fourth a list of the author's works. In his prologue Gerald speaks of his letter collection as a rich table filled with elegant dishes and a host of delicacies, where fastidious readers (*delicatis gustu*) can choose their own favorite dish, in other words a kind of literary smörgåsbord; he also refers to it as a garden or a flowering meadow where readers can select their own flowers.[80] In other words he is positioning himself in the same tradition as Arnulf and Peter of Blois. But for a reader expecting the richness and variety of these collections, Gerald's collection might well have come as a bit of a disappointment. It is rather short, at only 30 letters, and a large proportion of them are on the face of it basic, unadorned business letters, including several letters addressed to Gerald from others. There is little sign of the elaborate salutations or long purple prose passages which characterizes the writing of his colleague of Bath.

The reason is supplied by another passage in the prologue, where Gerald explains that he made a particular point of including the letters "in which I have described the downfall of my Davus whose wickedness tried me greatly".[81] In Greek comedy Davus is the wily slave who tricks the foolish old man. In the Middle Ages the word has come to signify a treacherous companion. Gerald's Davus was a Cistercian monk by name of William Wibert.[82] They travelled together on several missions from the English crown to Wales in the early 1190s and later Wibert spread the rumor that Gerald was a traitor who was egging the Welsh on to rebellion. A few years later Gerald had his revenge, by getting Wibert deposed as abbot of the monastery of Bethlesdene. At about the same time, in 1198, Gerald was strongly involved in the claim of the see of St David's to become an archbishopric – with himself, naturally, as the archbishop. The archbishop of Canterbury put a stop to Gerald's endeavors and eventually

79 Gui of Bazoches, *Letters*, no. 36, ed. Adolfsson, pp. 157–58.

80 Gerald of Wales, *Symbolum electorum*, Preface, ed. Brewer, pp. 199–200.

81 Ibid.: "easque [epistolas] praecipue quibus Davi mei dejectionem, cujus me mailitia plurimum exercuit, … elaboravi".

82 Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis*, pp. 88–89, 102–08.

another candidate was elected. Gerald himself clearly believed that it was the story of Bethlesdene that lay behind the whole affair: he had had Wibert deposed, Wibert was the archbishop's lackey; therefore, the archbishop was going to ruin him. On closer inspection, a large proportion of the letters turn out to be related to the Wibert affair and Gerald's problems with St David's. The collection has been interspersed with a few unrelated letters, a letter of dedication, a few letters of friendship, but there is nothing that looks like a thought-through program of *varietas*. The other three parts of the *Symbolum electorum* are not related to this affair, but give a strong impression of having been hastily assembled to fill out the work and add variety; the poetry, according to the author himself, consists of juvenilia[83] and the other sections are simply extracts from earlier works. It seems clear, then, that Gerald is using the by now conventional genre of a letter collection to present his own documentation of the Wibert affair in a way that might render it more palatable to a reader of general interests. To do so he needs to pad it out with material not directly related to this business, but this seems to have been done hastily and without much thought.

Gerald's second collection has a very similar genesis: it is an exchange of letters between himself and his nephew with whom he had had a falling out over a prebend, and its raison d'être is clearly to document his nephew's inexcusable behavior. The first half is a long tract in letter form where Gerald enumerates all the wrongs done to him by his nephew and uses the salutation to explain that very word "nephew" derives from "scorpion" (*nepa*).[84] To this Gerald added, at a later stage, a small group of letters directed by him to various ecclesiastics and stating his case. The function, then, of Gerald's letter collections is primarily that of documentation, though at least in the case of the *Symbolum electorum* he does make an effort to give it the appearance of a literary letter collection.

3 Developments of the Genre in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance

During the course of next few centuries, epistolography loses ground as one of the major literary genres. With rising levels of literacy and an ever-increasing need for written communication and recording, letter-writing itself

83 Gerald of Wales, *Symbolum electorum*, Preface, ed. Brewer, p. 200: "deinde metrica juvenilibus annis edita".

84 Gerald of Wales, *Speculum duorum*, eds. Lefèvre/Huygens, trans. Dawson, pp. 2–77.

becomes less of a specialist pursuit. As mentioned earlier, handbooks in letter-composition, *artes dictaminis*, sometimes with accompanying collections of exemplary letters, had already started appearing during the twelfth century. These now become a major influence on epistolary composition and with their assistance Latin letter-writing grows increasingly formulaic. The manuals provide the means for even the moderately Latinate to produce a functioning letter.[85]

At the same time, even basic Latinity is no longer a prerequisite for letter-writing. From the thirteenth century onwards, letters in the vernacular become increasingly common, reflecting the rise of a new generation of writers who are literate without having undergone a formal clerical education. The first vernacular letters in English royal correspondence date from the reign of Henry III; they are, as one would expect, not in English but in French, the language of the English nobility.[86] In the Stonor collection (1290–1483), while formal documents, such as charters and writs and the occasional letter from a churchman, are still in Latin, the more personal letters are in the vernacular: French throughout the fourteenth century and English in the fifteenth century.[87] On the Continent, a similar development takes place, with the vernacular gradually replacing Latin as the medium for epistolary exchanges between speakers of the same language. Thus, for instance, the collection of German private letters compiled by Georg Steinhausen contains letters in German, from the very beginning of the fourteenth century onwards.[88] At the same time, a general secularisation of the genre and a movement of letter-writing further down the social scale can be observed: the letters collected by Steinhausen are written not only by churchmen and members of the aristocracy, but also by members of the lower gentry and increasingly by women. In England, too, the writers of the fifteenth century Paston and Cely collections are burghers and, in the case of the Paston letters, members of the lower gentry, not abbots or bishops. In the Paston collection, at least, female writers are very much in evidence.[89]

As part of this development letters also become noticeably more focused on the practical side of the communication. In the twelfth century, letter-writing is often more about style than about actual content, the relevant factual information being supplied by the messenger who delivers the letter. The letter is primarily a means of maintaining contact rather than a medium for

85 See above, p. 93, n. 8.

86 See *Royal Letters of the Reign of Henry III*, ed. Shirley. The first monarch to use English in his correspondence is Henry V, nearly a century later.

87 *Stonor Letters*, ed. Kingsford.

88 *Deutsche Privatbriefe*, ed. Steinhausen.

89 *Paston Letters*, ed. David.

communicating facts. It provides an opportunity for the writer to display his skills and his to offer his painstaking attention to style as a gift to his correspondent. During the following centuries, letter-writing develops into a far more mundane affair. This is also reflected in the way in which letter collections were put together. As we have seen, the twelfth century collections are often put together with a dedication to a patron and disseminated and acquired as examples of good writing. The vernacular collections of the Later Middle Ages tend to have been assembled for more practical purposes: the Paston collection was originally collected and preserved at the Paston family seat perhaps with a view to using the letters as evidence in law suits, and the Stonor collection was probably taken to Chancery records, where they were later found, in connection with the attainder of one of its members in 1483 or in connection with a chancery suit that the family had in 1500.

However, with the coming of Humanism and its emulation of the ancients, the pendulum does swing back to some extent: parallel with the practical ephemeral missive, there is a renewed blossoming of the elegantly composed personal letter, what Witt refers to as "the letter as conversation".[90] The epistolary miniature essay, of the type cultivated by Pliny and Seneca, is given a new lease of life. We have letter collections by nearly all the major humanists: Boccaccio, Petrarch, Pico delle Mirandola, Coluccio Salutati, Marsilio Ficino, Enea Silvio Piccolomini (Pius II), Erasmus.[91] At the same time, the earlier medieval letters were still being read and copied. A sizeable proportion of the manuscripts of Peter of Blois stem from the fifteenth century or even later. As Sidwell has shown, Enea Silvio, who had access to a copy, did not only read and appreciate Peter's style but reworked one of his letters into his own *De curialium*.[92]

4 The Function(s) of Letter Collections

In the above, I have given a rather long, if by no means inclusive survey of eleventh and twelfth century letter collections and a brief résumé of later developments. It will be noted that I have not touched on the technicalities of the original letter itself, either as an artefact or as a message. Much work has

90 Witt, "The Arts of Letter-Writing", p. 68.

91 For an introduction to Renaissance epistolography, see Clough, "The Cult of Antiquity"; Guillén, "Notes towards the Study of the Renaissance Letter"; Worstbrock, *Der Brief im Zeitalter der Renaissance*.

92 Sidwell, "Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini's *De Curialium Miseriis*".

been done on this in the past and the reader is referred to the publications of Schmeidler, Erdmann, and Constable, all mentioned in the bibliography. Again, I have only touched very briefly on letters as a means of maintaining friendship networks or, for latter day scholars, as a source material for such networks, though here, too, much excellent work has been done.[93] Instead, my focus has been on the finished collection, the product copied into a manuscript and sent to a friend or added to the library, sometimes supplied with a proud prologue by the author.

Letter collections have been described in various ways. Schmeidler envisaged the typical letter collection as an almost organically growing archive which by its very nature would provide a life history of its author.[94] His view came under a great deal of criticism as scholars started engaging with the collections of writers such as St Bernard and Peter of Blois, which have arisen in very different ways. Still, there is no doubt that Schmeidler's definition works well for some collections; Wibald of Stablo is a case in point. Another description which became popular in the mid-twentieth century was "auto-biography".[95] This in many ways seems a good description of a collection such as that of Peter of Blois, which can best be understood in terms of self-fashioning. It is of course more difficult to adapt to those collections which have not been put together by the author, not to mention the multiple-author collections. A third description that also brings something to the discussion is that of "narrative".[96] This is a more flexible word, and one that fits a wide range of different texts: if Nicholas' Clairvaux collection is the narrative of the author's entry into the Cistercian order and his attempts to further its interests, then the collection of Peter of Blois can equally be seen as the narrative of its author's fluctuating career and moral concern for his fellow men. A quibbler might argue that "narrative" seems rather an active word for the essayistic and descriptive letters of Gui of Bazoches. Perhaps in this case, the term "portrait" might be more apt.[97] On consideration, I think I should like to keep all these four terms in mind – biography, autobiography, narrative, and portrait – in my consideration of the genre. Some authors fit one description better than another, some authors fit several. The collections of the early twelfth century bishops set out the narrative of their authors' struggles with popes and kings but also leave the reader

93 See in particular the works by McGuire and Haseldine listed in the bibliography.

94 Schmeidler, "Die Briefsammlung Froumunds von Tegernsee", pp. 220–21.

95 Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual*, p. 79.

96 I first heard Julian Haseldine use this term in a lecture he gave to the Wessex Medieval Centre in the early 2000s and it struck me as highly apposite.

97 For the idea of the letter collection as a means of presenting the author as a literary persona see also Haseldine, "The Creation of a Literary Memorial", p. 336.

with the image of a person, or rather a literary persona. The persona of Anselm is very different from that of Hildebert. The collection of Gui of Bazoches contains autobiographical details, for instance of the disastrous Feast of Fools, but above all it is a literary portrait, that of the Christian philosopher, which dominates his pages.

To me, the most striking thing about the genre is its sheer width and variety. There has perhaps been a tendency to want to define the genre through a few very well-known examples, primarily the letters of Peter of Blois and Bernard of Clairvaux, but this carries the danger of deflecting attention away from the diversity of the genre. Letter collections can be long or short, meticulously entered into archives letter by letter or the result of careful composition by selection. They can represent the letters of a single author or of multiple authors. They can reflect the affairs of the great or they can give an insight into the private life of an ordinary monk or junior cleric. They can be primarily business orientated or decidedly literary. They can range over a vast array of subjects or concentrate on a limited area. Some types of letters, for instance letters of pastoral advice, seem so very common that one might be tempted to regard them as a sine qua non of a letter collection – until one comes across a collection which shows no sign of them. Nor does the work of assembling a letter collection consist merely in the selection of suitable letters. As we have seen, the individual letter may well have undergone extensive revision to fit it for its new role and readership.

Some important differences between collections are to do with the difference in position and status of the author. Peter Damian, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Peter the Venerable are heads of major religious houses and figures of international standing in their own right; not only are they constantly engaged in the affairs of nations, but they are also asked for moral and theological advice. Hildegard does not have the same worldly status as these abbots, but holds a special position as a mystic and visionary. Nicholas of Clairvaux and Gui of Bazoches on the other hand are junior figures with no pastoral responsibilities; insofar as they do offer spiritual advice it has to be done under the guise of an act of friendship towards their peers. Peter of Blois occupies a curious in-between position: he has no definite pastoral role, but this never seems to stop him from telling all the world how to behave. Some writers act as secretaries to others (e.g., Peter of Blois, John of Salisbury, and Nicholas) and include in their collections letters written in the name of others and to some extent dependent on the orders of their employers. Other collections include letters written by secretaries in the name of the sender, or exchanges between the author and other writers. Letter collectors rarely speak about their task, but when they do,

their comments all tend in one direction.[98] As we have seen above, the main concern of those writers who do write prologues to their collections seems to be with literary qualities; they worry lest their letters should not fulfil the reader's expectations on style and elegance. They also speak of the varied nature of the contents as if this is something that is specific to the genre.

It is worth bearing in mind that most of the letter writers belong to a very small and closely knit culture, centred on France and the Angevin Empire. Many of them knew each other personally and kept in contact, sometimes through visits, often through letters. Lanfranc was the teacher of Anselm and possibly also of Ivo. Hildebert corresponded with both Ivo and St Bernard. Peter the Venerable belonged to a friendship circle which included Peter of Celle, Nicholas of Clairvaux and St Bernard, but also admitted Abelard to his monastery and corresponded with Heloise. Hildegard was in contact with St Bernard. John of Salisbury visited Celle. Peter of Blois regarded John as his master, worked with Arnulf of Lisieux and went on the Welsh journey with Gerald of Wales. Arnulf of Lisieux corresponded with Thomas Becket, and with Nicholas of Clairvaux. Even William of Aebelholt kept closely in touch with his old circle in Paris. In other words, these writers often knew each other personally and exchanged letters. They also read one another's letter collections. Nicholas commissioned a copy of Hildebert's letters for Clairvaux and Peter of Blois learnt his letters by heart.[99] John of Salisbury sent his own letter collection to Peter of Celle. The great number of early manuscripts containing some of the great letter collections also bears testimony to their availability. As their prologues show, letter writers had a clear idea of what was expected of the genre, and even when they were, in fact, attempting something rather different, they would still pay lip service to this ideal.

5 Conclusions: Tasks and Directions for Future Research

Almost a century has passed since Schmeidler's and Erdmann's research on medieval letters. Much work has been done on individual letter collections and, to some extent, on the genre as a whole. Research on individual manuscript traditions has enhanced our understanding of the procedures through

98 The following collections contain prologues by their authors: Herbert Losinga, both collections by Nicholas of Clairvaux, Arnulf of Lisieux, Peter of Blois, William of Aebelholt.

99 Nicholas of Clairvaux, *Letters*, no. 17, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 196, col. 1616; Peter of Blois, *Letters*, no. 101, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 207, col. 314.

which letter collections were assembled and revised. Extensive work done on friendship and friendship networks within the last 30 years has helped to place letters in context as evidence of communication between individuals and communities. Exploration of the genre as self-fashioning and narrative has deepened our understanding of the letter collection as a finished product.[100]

As to possible directions for future research, it seems to me that there are some areas of exploration which might prove particularly fruitful. The first of these is the area of editing. Though much work has been done in this field, some of the major letter collections still lack modern editions. The substantial work done on some of the major manuscript traditions in the last decades and the new technology available in the form of editing programs and databases all seem to suggest that there has never been a better time to rectify this deficiency.

A second area is that to which Walter Ysebaert drew attention in his article on medieval letters as historical sources.[101] In this essay, Ysebaert identified some of the pitfalls associated with using letters either as historical sources or evidence of style and reading without taking into account the circumstances of their production. The question of authorship is often complicated by the fact that a letter may have been composed by the author on behalf of another person (the sender), and frequently written out by a third party (the scribe) and then, at the collection stage, either revised by the author or by a later collector. This has serious implications for their potential use as source material. A series of in-depth studies of the composition of individual letter collections, including different recensions of the text, would deepen our understanding of the contribution of the various agents involved in the genesis and form a firmer foundation for historical and stylistic studies. As mentioned earlier in this article, some valuable work has been done (notably on Anselm and Hildebert), but much more remains.[102]

Bearing the above in mind, a third area of potential study would still seem to be that of comparative studies of style and of influences. While medieval reception of classical writers has received a certain amount of attention, more remains to be done, particularly as regards the influence of medieval letter writers on their contemporaries. Again, new technology, especially easily

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100 For work on epistolography and friendship, see for instance Haseldine, "Friends, Friendship and Networks"; id., "Love, Separation and Male Friendship"; id., "Understanding the Language of amicitia"; id., "Affectionate Terms of Address"; also Ysebaert, "Friendship and Networks".

101 Ysebaert, "Medieval Letters and Letter Collections".

102 See also the methodological remarks in Chapter 17 of this volume.

accessible databases, should make it possible to cover a wider range of material and evaluate similarities and differences. Similarly, it seems to me that our understanding of the genre would be enhanced by an integrated approach, covering a wide range of collections, in the investigation of categories of letters, parts of the letter and specific stylistic features. Which brings me to the final, and most important, *desiderandum*: a large, up-to-date, synthesizing, thorough account of medieval Latin epistolography, a work that would bring out the richness and variety of the genre, so as to make it clear to a wider readership that not only individual letter collections, but the genre itself offers a rich table filled with elegant dishes and a host of delicacies, where the gourmet reader can choose his own favorite dish.

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PART 2

Byzantine Letter-Writers in Context

CHAPTER 4

Michael Psellos

Floris Bernard

Perhaps even more than the letter collections of other Byzantine authors, the letters of the eleventh-century scholar, teacher, writer and political power broker Michael Psellos present manifold challenges. The difficulties in approaching them are considerable: they are numerous and heterogeneous; the rhetoric is allusive and full of irony, the philosophical parlance is abstruse; and contextual details elude us.[1] But perhaps we should emphasize their exceptional features rather than deplore the difficulties. Psellos' letters present a blend of characteristics that is unique. On the one hand, Psellos constructs a thoroughly literary world, full of imagination, metaphors, rhetorical play and philosophical digressions. On the other hand, his letters offer a glimpse into many facets of contemporary Byzantine society: emperors addressing other rulers, machinations in state administration, petty land disputes in villages, irreverent play between old friends, and much more. With an extremely versatile, intelligent, and playful personality at their center, the letters encompass nearly all the genres, registers, subjects, and types of addressees that are conceivable in Byzantine epistolography. And finally, uniquely for middle-Byzantine literature, later Byzantines perceived them as models to follow.

1 Overview of Scholarship

At the time of writing this chapter, we stand at a pivotal moment in the study of Michael Psellos' letters. A new complete edition, prepared by Stratis Papaioannou, has been published in the Teubner series.[2] Previously, nearly all of Psellos' letters, a total of about 515, had been edited in some way or another,[3] but often unsatisfactorily. The two most important editions were those of Kurtz/Drexl and Konstantinos Sathas. Paul Gautier edited some of the letters,

1 See also Lauxtermann, "Introduction" on the challenges of interpreting Psellos' letters.
2 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, ed. Papaioannou.
3 An overview of editions in Papaioannou, "Vorarbeiten", and Moore, *Iter Psellianum* (which lists unpublished letters at 145–46).

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also providing summaries, and Enrico Maltese and others have also edited smaller numbers of letters.[4]

Another very recent landmark is the publication of a collected volume based on an Oxford workshop, including essays and, importantly, summaries of all letters, with indices, bibliography, and datings, compiled by Michael Jeffreys.[5] This is the first book-length study that deals in a comprehensive way with Psellos' letters, and for many modern readers, the summaries will be the main portal to them.

Before this, scholars have approached the letter corpus with various interests in mind. Jakov Ljubarskij studied the letters in relation to Psellos' personality and his ever-shifting attitudes towards his contemporaries.[6] Günter Weiss made extensive use of the letter corpus to gain insight into Byzantine officialdom.[7] Stratis Papaioannou has investigated the representation of the self and of rhetorical discourse in Psellos, and more particularly in his letters.[8] Article-length studies have concentrated on specific individuals in Psellos' letter network: on Elias the monk,[9] Basil Maleses,[10] Leo Paraspondylos,[11] John Mauropous,[12] and the nephews of Michael Keroularios.[13] Other studies have viewed the letters with an interest in the themes of friendship,[14] Psellos' career in state administration,[15] his connections to monasteries,[16] or his network of teachers and pupils.[17] Psellos' letters also play a major part in some large-scale projects. Among these are Michael Grünbart's study on the forms of address in Byzantine epistolography,[18] and the *Prosopography of the Byzantine World*, an evolving online database of individuals living in the middle Byzantine centuries.[19]

4 See Michael Psellos, *Letters*, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. cxliv–cxlv; vol. 2, pp. 887–95 (concordance).
5 Jeffreys/Lauxterman, *Letters of Psellos*.
6 Ljubarskij, *Προσωπικότητα*.
7 Weiss, *Oströmische Beamte*.
8 Papaioannou, *Rhetoric*. See also id., "Glasort des Textes" and id., "Rhetoric and the Self".
9 Dennis, "Elias the Monk".
10 De Vries-van der Velden, "Gendre".
11 De Vries-van der Velden, "Amitiés dangereuses" and Reinsch, "Venomous Praise".
12 Lauxtermann, "Intertwined Lives".
13 Jeffreys, "Constantine, Nephew of Keroularios".
14 Tinnefeld, "Freundschaft".
15 Riedinger, "Quatre étapes".
16 Jeffreys, "Monastery".
17 Bernard, "Educational Networks".
18 Grünbart, *Anrede*.
19 Jeffreys et al., *Prosopography of the Byzantine World*.

2 An Erratic Transmission

In a recent article, Stratis Papaioannou investigated the manuscript transmission and Byzantine reception of Psellos' letters.[20] Uniquely for a major Byzantine letter corpus, Psellos' letters are transmitted scattered over many manuscripts, not as a unified collection. Attempts to preserve his letters started with Psellos' own correspondents: Letter 79 proudly mentions that the *caesar* John Doukas had Psellos' letters copied and bundled into books. Psellos became something of a classic for later Byzantine letter-writers: notably, a treatise attributed to Gregory of Corinth, echoed by Joseph Rhakendytes, states that "the most wise Psellos" is a "model for letters", next to the Cappadocian fathers, Synesios and Libanios.[21] The letters were indeed included in collections of epistolary models,[22] and imitated and recycled by later writers.[23] In spite of this, the transmission of Psellos' letters is erratic and chiefly dependent on rhetorical interests in restricted milieus. As Papaioannou demonstrates, Eustathios of Thessaloniki may have played an important role. Two manuscripts contain the bulk of Psellos' letters: Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Laur. Plut. 57.40 (from around 1100) and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. gr. 1182 (late twelfth century).[24]

The letters addressed to Psellos by his correspondents are almost never preserved. An exception is the letter of Kyritzes, a pupil of Psellos, complaining about Psellos' didactic choices (Letter 144), which spawns several reactions from Psellos (Letter 145 is the immediate answer; Letter 146 pursues the issue); and we also find a letter by John Mauropous to which Psellos answers (Letter 169, not included in Mauropous' own collection). Some pairs of letters are very similar to each other, which might indicate that they are alternative drafts, one of which was never sent.[25]

3 A Life in Letters

It is important to keep in mind that Psellos never made a collection of all his letters, and consequently did not revise them to prepare an "edition" in the

20 Papaioannou, "Fragile Literature".
21 Pseudo-Gregory of Corinth, *On the Four Parts of the Perfect Speech*, ed. Hörandner, p. 106, l. 120–22 (trans. at p. 111): Ἔχεις ἀρχέτυπα εἰς ἐπιστολάς … τὸν σοφώτατον Ψελλόν.
22 See the case in Volk, "Metaphrase".
23 See Grünbart, "From Letters to Literature".
24 Detailed description in Gautier, "Deux manuscrits pselliens".
25 Examples: Letters 155 and 156 (to the empress Eudokia), Letters 90 and 89 (from Michael Doukas to Robert Guiscard), and perhaps Letters 198 and 201.

same way, for example, that his teacher Mauropous did. Every letter is largely left as it is, determined by various parameters: the present point in Psellos' biography, the identity and hierarchical position of his addressee, the favor that Psellos enjoyed with powerful people, etc. No wonder that we discover so many discrepancies and contradictions when we now read the letter corpus as a whole. Psellos' opinions about himself, about themes such as rhetoric and philosophy, about language, and even about letter-writing itself, vary from one letter to the other. For his letters, even more than for other genres, it is clear that it is futile to try to reveal the "real" Psellos, and to make claims about what he thought or intended to propagate.[26] Thus, in his letter corpus we meet all the different aspects of this polyvalent figure. The letters also reflect all the phases and turns of his eventful career.[27] Or, rather than "reflect", one could say that these letters *are* themselves the flesh and bones of his career.

In some letters, we see Psellos as a young pupil, sending his regards to a teacher, respectfully asking for his friendship (see especially Letter 242, and also Letters 243, 245, 246; perhaps this teacher is Mauropous).[28] At a subsequent stage in his career, Psellos is *krites*,[29] certainly in the theme of Boukellarion and perhaps also in other themes. This is reflected by a letter to an official about horse relays (Letter 466), and one letter in which he complains about his work, confiding in an old school friend (Letter 453). He refers to his past as a *krites* of Boukellarion in Letters 300 and 306, and (probably) *krites* of Armeniakon in Letter 375.

Thereafter, Psellos begins his brilliant career as civil official under Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055). As an imperial secretary, he wrote letters on behalf of this emperor (Letter 185). His star as a teacher rises, he enjoys access to the emperor, he acquires property in the province and becomes for many people an important liaison at court. A large number of Psellos' letters can be dated to this period.

A watershed in Psellos' life is his retreat (or rather banishment) to the monastery of *Horaia Pege*, at Mount Olympos in faraway Bithynia. Many letters prepare for, or try to ward off, his tonsure and departure.[30] He tries to influence

26 On this elusiveness of Psellos, see now Jenkins, "Psellos".

27 See Jeffreys, "Summaries", esp. pp. 417–45 for the dating of the letters.

28 Lauxtermann, "Intertwined Lives".

29 For Psellos' letters as a *krites*, see Weiss, *Beamte*, pp. 21–23, and Riedinger, "Quatre étapes", pp. 5–30. Some letters also mentioned by Riedinger do not contain firm references to Psellos being *krites*.

30 An excellent overview of relevant letters in Jeffreys et al., *Prosopography of the Byzantine World*, unit "Correspondence between Michael Psellos & others over his proposed tonsure".

the archimandrite on Mt Olympos (Letter 386), and justifies to Xiphilinos, who had already left, his hesitation to leave (see Letters 198, 200, 201). His brief spell in the monastery and his controversial return to the capital continued to be a theme in later letters (Letter 433).

Psellos' later life and career are marked by fluctuation, and this leaves traces in his letters. His monastic status restricted his movements, preventing him from things such as going to the wedding of Constantine, the nephew of Michael Keroullarios (Letter 120). The military collapse of the eastern borders must have affected Psellos' social network significantly.[31] With each new emperor, Psellos had to win back favor. He entertains a rather formal relationship with Isaac Komnenos (1057–1059), exemplified by his efforts to reach Isaac through his nephew (Letter 41). He is very ambiguous towards Romanos IV Diogenes (1068–1071), one letter notably seeming to mock his blinding in a very sarcastic way (Letter 39).[32] With the Doukas family, relations are somewhat more cordial. During the reign of Constantine X Doukas (1059–1067), his chief connection was not the emperor himself, but his brother, the *caesar* John Doukas (see Letter 56 for an explicit assessment of this triangular relationship). In an apologetic letter to the empress-consort Eudokia Makrembolitissa, dated to 1068/69, he refers to his privileged position under previous emperors, which now seems to be over (Letter 157). This perhaps also explains why there is no letter to Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078), nor is there any letter, or any apparent reference in his letters, to Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–1081).

4 The Social Network

Psellos' letters establish, maintain and exploit an impressive social network that includes individuals from all levels in society. Civil officials make up the overwhelming majority of addressees. More than other Byzantine letter-writers, Psellos corresponds with officials belonging to the imperial state administration, such as *kouropalatai*, *epi ton deeseon*, *magistroi*, etc.[33] Many letters are sent to "judges" (*kritai*) of various *themata*. The letters to *kritai* tend to deal with matters of a more practical nature, and only some *kritai* (such as Zomes, *krites* of Opsikion) appear to be close friends of Psellos.

In an almost equal measure, Psellos addresses high-ranked clerics. The letters to the powerful patriarch Michael Keroularios, many of them exchanging

31 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 88, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 187, l. 22–33.
32 Braounou-Pietsch, "Ein Fall von Zynismus?".
33 Grünbart, *Anrede*, p. 104.

gifts, reflect a turbulent relationship that is sometimes friendly, sometimes tense. Psellos had closer contact with the nephews of Keroularios, especially Constantine, who was a powerful figure in the 1050s.[34] Psellos could keep appealing to their former teacher-student relationship. He also wrote to ecclesiastical officials in the province; with Aimilianos, the patriarch of Antioch, he maintained a very cordial and long-lasting relationship.[35]

The corpus also includes letters to emperors. Social hierarchy forced Psellos to assume a very deferential tone. Typically, in Letter 137, addressed to Isaac Komnenos, Psellos welcomes the willingness of Isaac to read his letter as an enormous favor; he likens himself to a stinking dog. As mentioned above, the *caesar* John Doukas is a very important node in Psellos' network during the period in which the Doukas family aspired to imperial power. Psellos considered him a good friend, who appreciated his artful letters (e.g., Letter 62), but it is in all respects clear that John Doukas assumes the role of patron. Letters to emperors were often sent to them when they were away on a military expedition (Letter 38 to Romanos Diogenes; Letters 140 and 142 to Isaac Komnenos).

Among Psellos' correspondents we also find monks and military aristocrats. Letters to these people frequently reflect the fact that they were less at home in the arcane world of the intellectual elite – I will elaborate on this when discussing the different linguistic registers in Psellos' letters. With the powerful Leo Paraspondylos, Psellos exchanges ironic letters that reflect a troubled relationship.[36]

Education was a cornerstone of Psellos' network.[37] Fellow schoolmates continued to preserve a strong feeling of attachment to each other and to their former teacher. Several letters argue that the bonds forged at school create an eternal friendship based on similar manners and a similar world view (Letter 453). The commitment of alumni towards their former school becomes evident when Psellos took steps to protect the monastery *Ta Narsou*, where he himself was educated (Letter 267). A considerable part of Psellos' social network consists of his former students. Many of his letters of recommendation concern pupils who had just finished education and had been sent to the province (e.g., Letters 166 and 374). In return, he addressed requests to some of his former pupils who were by then powerful officials, appealing to their special teacher-student relationship. This happens, for instance, in Letter 236, where

34 Jeffreys, "Constantine, Nephew of Keroularios".

35 See Ljubarskij, *Προσωπικότητα*, pp. 149–50.

36 See de Vries-van der Velden, "Amitiés dangereuses", Ljubarskij, *Προσωπικότητα*, pp. 140–49, and Reinsch, "Venomous Praise".

37 Bernard, "Educational Networks".

he asks Pothos, a former student, to waive taxes on a monastery that was under Psellos' care, because a teacher of philosophy and his student should not tax each other.

Finally, it is possible to distinguish an inner circle of friends who were close to Psellos. In the letters to these friends, we encounter a higher degree of emotional involvement and a more personal tone. Most of them belonged (or had belonged) to the Constantinopolitan intellectual elite. Just like Psellos, they based their career on education and service at the imperial court. One of his most important friends was John Mauropous.[38] Psellos shows himself conscious of Mauropous' contribution as a teacher to his own career. He praises his steadfast character and integrity. He lobbies for his return to the capital when Mauropous was spirited away as metropolitan of Euchaita, but some letters also testify to a certain tension between the two. Another close friend was John Xiphilinos, first *nomophylax* under Constantine IX Monomachos, then banished from the capital, only to return later as a patriarch; letters to him center around conflicting world views and moralities (famously in Letter 202). Constantine Leichoudes is also commonly counted among Psellos' inner circle,[39] but letters to him (for instance, Letter 147) seem to reveal a more conventional distant relationship.

5 Exchanging Services

Psellos used this network to channel and exchange various services and favors. He acted as a power broker and mediator, protecting the interests of himself and of others. In the vast majority of Psellos' letters, we will find, if we are willing to work through the metaphors, allegories, and "philosophical" digressions, that there is a concrete business matter at hand. With these letters, we dive into the heart of what must have been the prime interests of many civil and ecclesiastical officials in the mid-eleventh century. These officials appear as caught in an instable world, in a delicate balance of favors, reputations, and shifting alliances. There are tensions between the capital and the provinces, between formal and informal settlements of cases, between conflicting areas of jurisdiction, and so on.

In many cases, Psellos attempts to obtain favors for others, not for himself. Intercession (μεσιτεία) is often what is asked from Psellos, and many letters begin by stating that others have requested him to write (e.g., Letter 464).

38 Lauxtermann, "Intertwined Lives" and Ljubarskij, *Προσωπικότητα*, pp. 70–83.

39 Chondridou, "Τετράς των σοφών" and Ljubarskij, *Προσωπικότητα*, pp. 92–96.

He acts as a liaison, most often between a friend and the court, or between a provincial official and a socially inferior person who is sent there. Many letters thus concern a triangular relationship, between an applicant, a person appealed to, and an intermediary (Psellos himself). We find letters from all different phases of a service. He introduces and expresses requests (ἀξίωσις), informs the applicant about the progress of a request to a third person, and also follows up by thanking people for their services (e.g., Letter 402).

Recommendation is one of the more frequent favors that Psellos offers. Typically, Psellos sends letters of introduction to a *krites* (or other important official) in the province and pleads for someone newly arriving in his area of jurisdiction. Very often, these are notaries (as in Letters 307 and 316). Psellos also asks high-placed clerics or abbots for protection for monks (Letters 11), or provincial officials for lower-ranked clerics arriving in their area of jurisdiction (Letters 320 and 479). The situation of Psellos' protégés was often dire: they were poor, miserable, young, bereft of connections or protection, or they had been punished. Psellos asks the addressee to offer help and protection, or simply to be lenient (Letter 429). What these protégés often needed was a connection, an *oikeiosis*, a term which operates on a lower level than friendship (*philia*). Psellos recommends them by saying they are modest (Letter 381), that they will sing the praises of the addressee (Letter 468), that they will not require great expense (Letter 307), and/or that they have been educated by Psellos (Letter 305). Often, it is the letter bearer who is recommended or introduced (Letters 377, 431, etc.). The itinerant monk Elias is a special case: in several letters, Psellos informs provincial officials of the imminent advent of this vagrant buffoon and secretary of Psellos, who is able to bring pleasure and entertainment, but not without material support.[40]

Psellos was often called upon to further or change careers. Some *kritai* asked to be transferred to another, more advantageous, *thema* (e.g., Letters 338 and 406). Or they desired to be released from their office and to be allowed to return to the capital.[41] In many letters, Psellos assures correspondents that he is assiduously trying to convince the emperor (or other important officials in the capital) to discharge them from their office of *krites*; Letter 92, to Zomes, *krites* of Opsikion, sketches the problems of doing so. One series of letters reports Psellos' attempts to relieve Nicholas Skleros from his office of *krites* of Aigaion (Letters 268–271). In some cases, their stay in the province was explicitly referred to as an exile, as for Constantine Hierax in Letter 97 and Kalokyros in Letter 99. Psellos also intervened in the appointments of bishops (Letter 309).

40 Dennis, "Elias the Monk".
41 Weiss, *Beamte*, p. 38.

Many letters concern the monasteries which Psellos, as a wealthy layman, protected and supervised in exchange for benefits, according to the *charistikion* system.[42] In Letter 91, he asked a *krites* of Opsikion to waive taxes on Medikion, a monastery he had just acquired.[43] This letter demonstrates that Psellos saw his monastery as an agricultural business that could yield gains on investments.[44] In Letter 348, he put pressure on a *krites* to ward off tax from the monastery of Megala Kellia, of which he is *charistikarios* (see also Letter 349). In other letters, Psellos shows himself concerned with the water supply of "his" monasteries (Letters 232 and 350).[45]

Taxation is a recurrent topic.[46] Whereas Psellos sometimes wanted tax collectors to keep away from his business (e.g., Letter 91), he at other times protected their interests (Letters 161, 279, 301). Almost all of these letters are addressed to *kritai*. He tried to influence the assignment of the right to levy taxes (as in Letter 470), or the place and manner in which they were paid (Letter 297). In Letter 336, he asks a *krites* to protect the widow of a former tax collector against claims from the treasury.

Psellos dealt with a host of other affairs in the province, mostly acting on behalf of others, and trying to influence provincial officials. Land ownership was an important issue. He writes about the establishment of boundaries between land parcels (Letters 218 and 302),[47] and the clash of interests between several officials over land given by the emperor (Letters 228 and 368).[48] He intervenes in lawsuits (Letter 502), sometimes asking to annul earlier judgments (Letter 308). He also meddles in ecclesiastical affairs, reconciling bishops (Letters 21, 25, 152, 281), or pleading with clerics for monks to return to their flocks (Letter 9). Other letters concern the forgery of a signature (Letter 330), the loss of a mulberry plantation (Letter 347), etc.

This incomplete overview of the matters with which Psellos was involved shows that letters served above all as a channel for informal services, based on personal acquaintance and patronage relationships, circumventing official administration. This smacks of corruption, and indeed, some letters imply that Psellos' requests are of a dubious morality. In Letter 306, Psellos asks to rescind a judgment he had given relating to the taxation of a village. The villagers

42 See Jeffreys, "Psellos and the Monastery".
43 See also Weiss, *Beamte*, p. 52.
44 Morris, *Laymen*, p. 264.
45 Weiss, *Beamte*, p. 62.
46 Ibid., pp. 51–56.
47 Ibid., pp. 50–51.
48 Jeffreys et al., *Prosopography of the Byzantine World*, unit "Psellos wrote about the basilikos of Madytos, to avoid trouble from a local tourmarches".

had once welcomed and entertained Psellos while he was passing by, and it is only natural that one favor should entail another. Admitting that he is using sophistry, he argues that friendship should be weighed against "pure justice", implying that the former should prevail over the latter. In a letter to a patriarch (Letter 395), he states he is glad that the patriarch has "forsaken the precision of justice to climb up to the supreme heights of philanthropy".[49]

Some letters to intimate friends reveal the procedures of how to handle an affair, that is, how to influence the emperor or other powerful people at court (see Letter 365). Both in Letter 99 and Letter 256, Psellos describes the sly and cunning ways by which he manipulates the emperor when he is most receptive to a request, and how he steers the subject towards recommendation of his friend, which will bring him many advantages. In Letter 406, when the applicant had become impatient, Psellos argues that convincing the emperor can be a complex affair requiring many different stages. In Letter 276, Psellos describes the court as a place of arcane mysteries, where people deceive and pretend. In Letter 168, to Mauropous, he likens the attempts to win over the emperor to a theater play, in which Psellos and Mauropous are stage director and actor.

Psellos' eloquence and networking skills are often represented as part of an exchange. His tongue is a powerful asset, especially in combination with his right of access to the emperor. Psellos' tongue can make or break reputations, and influence opinions of the mighty. Many letters report to the addressee that Psellos is praising him in the presence of the emperor (e.g., Letters 332, 364a). In letters addressed to Mauropous, Psellos assures him that he uses all his eloquence to convince the city (complete with its "theaters") and the emperor of Mauropous' virtues (Letter 173, esp. l. 69–78); he does everything he can to turn the subject of conversation and the subject of his writing to the recommendation of Mauropous (Letter 175, esp. l. 6–16). In Letter 88, he boasts that the entire city holds his (anonymous) friend in high regard thanks to Psellos' "tongue". In Letter 493, he promises that if his correspondent becomes more generous, he will soon have his kindness trumpeted on the squares of the city. In Letter 91, a *krites* who foregoes taxes on Psellos' monastery will acquire a tongue that is able to bring praise. A frequent image consists of the correspondent offering his "hand", whereas Psellos offers his "tongue". "Hand" stands for power, material influence, perhaps often just for money, while "tongue" refers to Psellos' persuasive power, in conversation and letters (e.g., Letter 123). In Letter 95, to the *kouropalates* Iasites, Psellos exploits this idea to the full,

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49 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 395, ed. Papaioannou, p. 815, l. 3–4: τὸ ἀκριβὲς τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἀφεὶς ἐπὶ τὸ ὕψος τῆς φιλανθρωπίας ἀνέδραμες.

presenting an exchange of a mule for a letter (an *alogon* for a *logos*).[50] It is evident that Psellos is able to exploit his intellectual abilities by turning them into an item that can, like any other, be exchanged for material or social favors.

Other letters respond to familial events and brim with emotional language: the birth of his own grandson (Letter 51), or a friend's grandson (Letter 273, to Romanos Skleros), the sickness of his daughter (Letter 160), the death of a dear one (the mourning of Anastasios Lyzix recurs in many letters, such as Letter 263), etc.[51]

6 Epistolary Friendship

Friendship (*philia*) is the overarching social and cultural ideal to which Psellos refers in order to keep his network up and running.[52] The requests, promises and progress reports are almost never limited to a simple treatment of the matter; they are invariably framed within the ideology of friendship, appealing to a personal bond. Many letters begin with a reminder of what *philia* amounts to, leading to the introduction of a request (Letter 344).

Philia is for Psellos a social code that lays emphasis on certain qualities that help the smooth functioning of his network. Friends are accessible, happy to help, share each other's burdens, also love friends of friends, etc.[53] In Letter 65, to John Doukas, Psellos states that letters between them are written based on shared attitudes and a shared appreciation of beautiful language, something he does not find elsewhere in the city. Friends are thus asked to subscribe to the same intellectual ideals as Psellos. Not coincidentally, the address ἰσόψυχος ("friend of like soul") occurs far more often in Psellos than it does in other letter-writers.[54] Psellos also frequently uses kinship language (brother, nephew, etc.) to designate spiritual bonds with friends.

In the intellectual kind of friendship that Psellos propagates, letters make up the flesh and bones of *philia*. Often, letters begin by once more reminding the recipient that for friends far apart, letters are the essence of friendship itself (e.g., Letter 65). If friendship is not characterized by letters or

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50 Bernard, "Logoi and Aloga". See also Letters 251 and 279.

51 Some letters regarding Psellos' family or his friends are translated and introduced by Stratis Papaioannou in Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons*.

52 For *philia* in Psellos' letters, see Tinnefeld, "Freundschaft", who gives more weight to the theory, and Ljubarskij, *Προσωπικότητα*, pp. 178–86, who rather considers its practical application.

53 Ljubarskij, *Προσωπικότητα*, p. 181.

54 Grünbart, *Anrede*, p. 201.

conversations, by what else then (Letter 503)? What conversation is for friends who are together, letters are for separated friends (Letter 505). Psellos shares with many Byzantine letter-writers the motif that letters are a truthful imprint of the friend's character, and thus replace his living presence (e.g., Letter 3, esp. l. 26–29). In Letter 454, Psellos even states that written discourse in letters better preserves the complexities of someone's personality than spoken words; therefore, it makes sense to write, even though both are in the capital. Also, letters are by definition friendly. Only a very few letters openly attack the addressee (e.g., the monk Pherebios in Letter 275).

Many letters simply function as reminders of friendship. While seemingly void of content, they serve to maintain the network and the ideology behind it. They assure the correspondent that Psellos still thinks of him, or urge the correspondent to write more often. Not sending letters amounts to the rejection of friendship (e.g., Letters 191, 281). Friendship is like a lamp that is extinguished if no letters are sent (Letter 539a). Many letters are simply exhortations to write (Letters 3, 489), accusations of being silent, or forestall possible excuses from a friend who does not write often enough (Letter 449). Friends should answer friends' letters: reciprocity is an important principle, and time intervals between letters should never be too long (Letter 509). Writing begets writing, argues Psellos on numerous occasions (e.g., Letter 123), and he also uses the metaphor of female breasts, which produce milk because a child is nursing (at length in Letter 133).

In this last letter, we encounter the frequent metaphor that letters create a debt that the friend should repay (see also, e.g., Letter 7, esp. l. 1–13). The imagery of taxes is also used (see, e.g., Letter 88, esp. l. 8–9). This is jocular language, of course, but nonetheless says something about the importance of reciprocity.

The only argument that has the power to impede the evident connection between *philia* and writing letters, is that from a more moral or ascetic point of view, silence is superior. Letters 197 and 201 (both to Xiphilinos) attempt to tackle this argument: silence is commendable for purely divine men, but people like Xiphilinos and Psellos must take a middle way, which is exemplified by the church fathers Gregory and Basil, who also sent letters to each other.

Emotional language is not uncommon. Epistolary friends feel a burning desire to read each other's letters, they are impatient, overcome with sadness because of their separation, and with joy when a letter arrives (e.g., Letter 449). Letters can bring solace, a brief respite from worries. Of course, gifts play a great role in the functioning of epistolary friendship.[55]

55 See also Chernoglazov, "Was bedeuten drei Fische?".

This epistolary *philia* implies also a sense of playfulness and banter. In Letter 192, a friend was offended by some of Psellos' teasing, whereupon Psellos argues that playful ridicule and jest are essential features of friendship. In Letter 168, he reminds Mauropous of the right behavioral codes (the "ethos") of epistolary *philia*: he should not be too severe or serious, or take Psellos' letters in a very literal way. Psellos often refers to reactions such as smiling and laughing upon reading a letter (Letter 407, esp. l. 4). He expects his correspondent to laugh at puns (Letter 5, esp. l. 70). Letters ought to be read with a smile and not be taken too seriously (Letter 175, to Mauropous). They can be a game, fun to write, and fun to read (Letter 131, to Constantine, nephew of Keroularios).

7 Letters as a Genre

It is sometimes not easy to draw the line between a letter and another text. In an exegetical text on the titles of the psalms, now included among his *Theologica*, Psellos clearly refers to the text's status as a letter.[56] It is not a συγγραφή, he says, but an ἐπιστολή: the genre (εἶδος) constrains him to cut short his explanations. Likewise, several works included in his *Philosophica* refer to themselves as "letters".[57] One could say that the question of whether a text is a letter or not can be solved by looking at the manuscript context. But here too, we are presented with an ambiguous situation. A good example is Psellos' answer to a request to summarize the *Organon* of Aristotle.[58] In the already mentioned codex Par. gr. 1182, it can be found in between other writings addressed to pupils or put forward as didactic exercises. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 712, by contrast, is very clearly an epistolographic anthology; the compiler of this manuscript must have regarded the text foremost as a letter.

While Psellos never refers to ancient theories of epistolography, he does mention Gregory and Basil as models, rather on a moral level (see Letter 197). And he does show himself aware of certain "rules" of the epistolary genre. He repeatedly brings up the "law of letters" (ὁ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν νόμος), which limits the length of the letter.[59] In Letter 163, addressed to Mauropous, the "law of

56 Michael Psellos, *Theologica*, no. 1, eds. Westerink/Duffy, p. 10, l. 260–65.

57 Michael Psellos, *Philosophica minora*, no. 16, ed. O'Meara, p. 76, l. 1: γράμμα, l. 29: δι' ἐπιστολῆς; no. 47, p. 160, l. 4: ἀντιγραφή.

58 Michael Psellos, *Theologica*, no. 5, eds. Westerink/Duffy, pp. 46–52.

59 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 88, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 188, l. 62; no. 421, ibid., vol. 2, p. 840, l. 3.

letters" refers to the codes of epistolary friendship: letters unite friends who are separated from each other.

Letters also adopt functionalities and methods of rhetorical genres, with the difference that the speaker is separated from the addressee. An example is the consolatory letter;[60] Psellos uses all the usual rhetorical techniques and arguments (e.g., Letter 508). Similarly, the lengthy Letter 140, to Isaac Komnenos, can be considered as a panegyrical oration written from a distance; Psellos also refers to this text as "praises".[61]

Letters can transmit knowledge, as the examples above have made clear.[62] In the rather informal system of teaching, the letter may have had practical purposes as didactic texts. There are other examples where Psellos fuses the roles of epistolary friend and teacher. In a pair of letters to Constantine, nephew of Keroularios, he follows up in the second letter upon a scientific issue raised in the first (Letters 123, 124). Other letters respond to casual questions (for instance, Letter 46 to *caesar* Doukas). In Letter 492, Psellos gives cheese, using the occasion to embark on a rather bizarre explanation about this foodstuff, thus combining "intellectual" cheese with real cheese; of course this is part of a game.

8 Self-Representation and "Philosophy"

At the center of all these letters is, of course, Michael Psellos himself. The first person (and sometimes the third person singular) is extensively used in the letters to represent himself, vent his opinions, express his emotions. As in his other works, Psellos is keen to justify his actions and his social status. Often, this self-representative writing verges on the apologetic, as if Psellos had to explain some contradictions and refute criticisms. Many of his letters attempt to come to terms with a tension that I view as central to Psellos' life and works: the tension between, on the one hand, the obvious ambition and self-promotion of a *homo novus*, making a career through education, eloquence, and cunning social networking, and on the other hand, the expectations of moral integrity and self-denial, so important in Byzantine culture, especially

60 Littlewood, "Letter of Consolation". See also Sarres, *Παραμυθητική ἐπιστολή*, esp. pp. 41–46 and 189–193 on similarities between consolatory letters and speeches.

61 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 140, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 377, l. 35–36: ταῖς ἐκ τῶν λόγων εὐφημίαις καταγεραίρω.

62 See also Chapter 8 in this volume.

for a man connecting himself with *hoi logoi*. In his letters, the former often appears as "rhetoric", the latter as "philosophy".

I believe that we are still far removed from an accurate understanding of what φιλοσοφία and φιλόσοφος mean to Psellos.[63] In Psellos' letters, it appears variously as a spiritual and intellectual ideal, a method to gain knowledge, and a certain way of life, close to asceticism but also close to the ideal of the learned man, the *logios*. The issue becomes further complicated by Psellos' forced tonsure and his subsequent comeback to the capital as advisor and tutor of emperors. His prominent functions were envied and attacked (see Letter 196, to Xiphilinos), and he is conscious of his own power, and the fact that it may have caused offence (Letter 199, also to Xiphilinos). The self-presentation of Psellos as a philosopher is ridden with problems and doubts. After all, as he says to Constantine, nephew of Keroularios: "I do not know who I am, whether a philosopher or some other animal perhaps more complicated than Typhon."[64]

In his letters, Psellos develops many strategies to deal with this tension. Very frequently, as in his other texts, he argues that he pursues a middle way, a novel and justifiable mix of "philosophy" and "rhetoric".[65] On several occasions, he tones down his involvement with φιλοσοφία, or implies that "his" φιλοσοφία is not of the most severe and pure sort. Thus, in Letter 500, to a close friend, Psellos admits that he is not able to preserve the "philosophical" at all times: he is bound to his nature.[66] He sometimes uses the metaphor of black and white to indicate that his "philosophy" is not entirely pure (Letter 199). In Letter 456, he divides philosophy into two, and it is the more human, sociable kind that he prefers; this impromptu definition of philosophy directly leads to a request (the introduction of a friend). We see here again the remarkable osmosis between the world of abstract ideas and a world of concrete business.

Typically, in Letter 498, Psellos posits that both he and his (anonymous) friend are philosophers, because they can communicate with each other through spiritual means. But of course, as humans, material things have an influence on their life, and it is from this human nature that Psellos and he successfully handle a certain case (the particulars of which are not mentioned).

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63 I refrain from giving a complete list of studies on philosophy in Psellos; two very contrasting opinions may suffice: Kaldellis, *Argument* and Gouillard, "Religion des philosophes". I rather sympathize with Gouillard's view that Psellos' philosophy is more a "style" than a "pensée", especially in the case of his letters.

64 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 134, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 357, l. 46–47: Ἐγὼ δέ, οὐκ οἶδα μὲν ὅστις εἰμί, εἴτε φιλόσοφος, εἴτε τι ἄλλο, ζῶον ἴσως Τυφῶνος πολυπλοκώτερον. Translation from Papaioannou, *Rhetoric*, p. 177, where there is also discussion of the letter.

65 See Papaioannou, *Rhetoric*, pp. 36–39 and *passim*.

66 For the place of "nature" in this argument, see Papaioannou, *Rhetoric*, p. 146.

In Letter 64, Psellos lets John Doukas, partake in the prestigious title of "philosopher", because he is appreciative of Psellos' abilities. But these abilities are decidedly rhetorical: Psellos mentions, for instance, his melodious style. Sometimes, it seems that Psellos just uses the word "philosophos" to indicate that someone behaves as he would expect; after all, is it so "philosophical" to decide a lawsuit about land division in favor of Psellos' associates (Letter 235)?

In other letters, he goes further than that. In a letter to Pothos, an intimate friend, he argues that pure philosophy is only for monks: people like Pothos and Psellos should use sophistry to obtain their goals (Letter 214). They should pretend to serve justice, but at the same time, they should fill their purses. In this unusually outspoken declaration of deceit and duplicity, the philosophical facade crumbles. In my view, Psellos' letters show eminently that the label "philosopher" is to this polymath a title of prestige, conferring an immense symbolic capital, without necessary implying a method of thinking or research, not even an involvement with existing philosophical texts.

In a related self-representative strategy, Psellos tends to emphasize his versatility and elasticity of mind as positive qualities.[67] He consistently represents himself as polyvalent, able to shift according to circumstances. In a letter to John Doukas, he boasts that he can suddenly switch his tone (Letter 59). A famous letter to Keroularios spells out all the differences between the accessible and flexible courtier (like Psellos himself) and the severe cleric which Keroularios is (Letter 111). In a letter to Constantine, nephew of Keroularios, he says that he first tries to measure the disposition of the audience before him, whether they are lazy or alert, somber or happy, and then adapts his discourse accordingly (Letter 123). This is also what we see in practice: depending on the social and cultural status of the addressee, Psellos adopts different styles and registers (as we will see below).[68]

9 Styles and Registers

A lemma to a letter that Psellos wrote as a secretary, in the name of Constantine IX Monomachos, reads as follows: "To a new convert, as if from the emperor Monomachos, who thus gave the impression of being very wise,

67 See Papaioannou, *Rhetoric*, pp. 145–46 for this feature in Psellos' letters.

68 Ljubarskij, *Προσωπικότητα*, pp. 68–70; see also p. 38 for considerations on Psellos' personality.

as also the letter demonstrates."[69] This indicates that letters are an excellent opportunity to display learning and eloquence. Psellos himself frequently draws attention to these features. In Letter 280, he says that his friend is captivated by Psellos' ebullient style, to which rhythm greatly contributes. He is also conscious of the degree of theatricality and pretense in his letters.[70] He admits playing roles, setting up stages, making a show of his letters (Letter 547, to John Doukas).

An important element of this charming display is the continual recourse to an imaginary literary world. The letters operate within a shared cultural framework, a canvas of intertextual and extratextual allusions, references, and metaphors.[71] The scene of Psellos' letters is peopled with biblical prophets, Roman emperors, ancient philosophers, mythological monsters; the Muses and Graces figure prominently; the décor shifts from ancient theater to Eleusis and Etna. These references are no mere decoration but convey a message that requires some decoding. For example, Psellos often alludes to the emperor by the biblical image of the life-bringing wood (e.g., Letter 127, l. 22). The hunt stands for the attempts of the letter sender to "catch" his addressee, that is, to find him and captivate him with his words (Letter 50, to John Doukas, is an elaborate example).

These projections of the concrete contemporary world into a world of literary and philosophical allusions make interpretation for us more difficult. What is one to make of the three debts that the patriarch of Antioch had settled, one of which was black, the other of gold, the other a "pride of Antioch" (Letter 7)? A letter (ink), money, and garments (sometimes mentioned as typical for Antioch)? To what does the number four at the end of Letter 173 refer, complete with Pythagorean reminiscences? Four gifts, perhaps? Likewise, a reference to a moon in Letter 162 has given rise to widely diverging identifications and speculations.[72] Sensitive information or harmful opinions are covered with allusive language – Psellos sometimes even deliberately silences himself (Letter 112, at l. 29–31). Who or what is the "leopard" threatening Psellos in Letter 488, a letter full of allusions to classical stories, which are in some way or another to be understood as references to events in Psellos' life? Or was the leopard literally a leopard, that is, a pet?[73] Perhaps we should not try

69 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 185, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 485: Πρὸς νεοφώτιστον ὡς ἐκ τοῦ βασιλέως τοῦ Μονομάχου· ἔοικε δὲ οὗτος εἶναι σοφώτατος ὡς καὶ ἡ ἐπιστολὴ δηλοῖ.

70 Papaioannou, *Rhetoric*, pp. 147–49. On play and theater in Psellos' letters, see also Ljubarskij, *Προσωπικότητα*, pp. 108–09.

71 See Mullett, "Classical Tradition" for Byzantine letters in general.

72 For a summary, see Ljubarski, *Προσωπικότητα*, p. 78, n. 13.

73 So Papaioannou, *Rhetoric*, p. 11, n. 28.

to understand, since Psellos himself at the end of this letter says that it is presented as a riddle-like game, so that his friend can laugh at Psellos' troubles: the joke must be a private one. Elsewhere too, Psellos concedes that he is talking in riddles (Letter 4, at l. 32–33). Privately shared information is in this case, and in others, essential to the understanding of the letter. But the penchant for intimate, or arcane, knowledge is not just a dislike for concrete details: rather, it strengthens the bonds between the few people who are "in the know".

At the other end of the spectrum, letters should, for practical purposes, not be so abstruse as to be unintelligible. Among his correspondents were undoubtedly people who did not appreciate exaggerated rhetorical sophistication. Psellos occasionally states that he appreciates an unadorned style and easy diction. Thus, Psellos reassures the aristocrat Dalassenos that he could write a letter in simple, "soldierly" style, as long as he writes (Letter 35). In Letter 375, to a metropolitan, Psellos argues that a professed lack of learning does not count as an excuse not to write. The letter shows that there were certain expectations, but that Psellos, in certain circumstances, did not wish them to stand in the way of his network building. Sophisticated writing, in the eyes of some of his correspondents, could be viewed with suspicion. Psellos shows himself sensitive to moral constraints operating on rhetoric. In Letter 147, a letter to a monk on Mt Olympos, he argues that a disingenuous style reflects a disingenuous and straightforward character, and has therefore greater spiritual value.

It is of course no coincidence that he puts forward these arguments in letters addressed to monks and military men. The register of style and language that Psellos selected (and the way he assesses these registers) was dependent on the social status and educational background of his addressees. In one letter, he even admits that he does not choose to "Atticize" with everybody, but that he tunes his discourse according to the people with whom he converses; he specifically mentions religious people (Letter 5, at l. 47–51). Again, this is an example of how Psellos advocates his own versatility.

10 Psellos' Letters in the Future

With new tools soon available or recently published, the study of Psellos' letters can start in earnest. The methods of the literary scholar and the historian should fruitfully enrich each other in our venture to understand these texts. Prosopography is a necessary, but hazardous, task. Studies of middle Byzantine monastic governance, tax systems, judicial procedures, court ceremony, etc. can enrich our understanding of Psellos' letters, which can in their turn

contribute valuable information to our knowledge of these areas. A definitive and complete biography of Psellos[74] could bring some order to the dating and the explanation of several letters. But we can also make progress in our interpretive skills. When interpreting these letters, we should pay attention to irony, playfulness, as well as to the typical quirks, motifs, and semantic layers of epistolary and, so to say, Psellian, language. Only then can these remarkable texts start to make sense.

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74 The short overview in Papaioannou, *Rhetoric*, pp. 4–13, is an excellent place to start.

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CHAPTER 5

The Letters of Demetrios Kydones

Florin Leonte

1 Introduction

Of all the Byzantine letter writers, Demetrios Kydones (*c.*1324–*c.*1397) is the author of one of the lengthiest extant epistolary collections including 450 pieces that span over a period of four decades. This collection has been preserved in several manuscripts including an autograph codex with the author's corrections. In terms of their content, like many Byzantine letters, they can be placed at the "intersection of politics and literature".[1] Owing to the author's diplomatic, political, and cultural pursuits, these texts, albeit couched in an elaborate language, offer an insight into the concerns and values of the ruling elites of the second half of the fourteenth century. Previous studies have dealt with various historical and thematic aspects of Kydones' letters,[2] but the purpose of this chapter will be to provide an overview of this extensive letter collection, including the major topics and functions it fulfilled in its social and political context. Arguably, the letters provided both a platform for conveying political messages present in other public speeches of his, as well as a way of projecting the self-fashioned image of an intellectual who also played the role of a mentor for several scholars.

A few words on the methodology are necessary here. When examining a Byzantine letter collection, one has to consider not only the texts but also other material and social circumstances that can leave traces on the epistolary communication. More than other literary forms, the understanding of the epistolary messages and functions depend heavily on their synchronical and diachronical contextualization, that is, the activities alluded to in the text, the participants in the epistolary exchange, and last but not least, the formation of the letter collection and its circulation. For this reason, I will look at the letters both as individual units as well as parts of a whole. On the other hand, while several studies have mined Kydones' collection for historical information,

1 Stephenson, "The Written World", p. 133.

2 On Demetrios Kydones (Trapp, *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit* (henceforth PLP), no. 13876) as political and literary personality, see Tinnefeld, *Die Briefe des Demetrios Kydones*; Kianka, "Demetrius Cydones"; id., "Demetrios Kydones and Italy"; Ryder, *The Career and Writings*.

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this chapter will offer an analysis that is necessarily more concentrated and one which emphasizes the functions of the letters as well as the author's self-representation.

2 The Background of the Letters

Before looking at Demetrios Kydones' letter collection, a glance at his biography and at the major features of the late Byzantine state can help one identify the premises upon which most pieces in this epistolary corpus were based. Kydones' rise and career in a high-ranking court position began in 1347 when he was forced to move to Constantinople, because his residence in Thessaloniki had been destroyed by the locals, who were unhappy with his family's support of the Kantakouzenoi.[3] Once in Constantinople, the emperor-regent John VI Kantakouzenos, a friend of his father, swiftly introduced him to the Byzantine court and he became one of the emperor's main servants, μεσάζων τοῖς πράγμασιν, the chief minister at the late Byzantine court. Kydones soon revealed his skills and learning which led him to undertake various tasks including diplomatic missions. Although John VI was forced to leave the throne to the younger John V Palaiologos in 1354, by that time Kydones had already shown his talents, which made the new emperor retain him in the court service. After some hesitation, he accepted the offer to continue at the court of an emperor in conflict with his previous protector. But more than that, Kydones increased his influence. Having converted to Catholicism as part of his efforts to push for tighter connections with the West,[4] he persuaded Emperor John V to convert as well, during a visit to Italy in 1370. Later, after he had resigned from the position of *mesazon*, he maintained his interest in the crucial matters of Byzantine politics. He continued to promote the idea of rapprochement to the West and often traveled to Italy where he established contacts with the humanist intellectuals. These relations helped him acquire Venetian citizenship in 1391 and also to gain the admiration of the humanist Coluccio Salutati.

The role of Demetrios Kydones in mid-fourteenth-century Byzantine court politics and diplomacy can hardly be overestimated. Judging from his own writings, he had influence at the Byzantine court and constantly advertised his

3 Between 1342 and 1349 the so-called Zealots, members of the lower class in Thessaloniki, ruled the city. They ousted the city governor, a supporter of the Kantakouzenos family, and according to Gregoras introduced the rule of the mob. Kydones' father who had served the city governor and John Kantakouzenos, was forced to leave the city together with his family. See Kazhdan, "Zealots".

4 His conversion took place in 1357 as a result of his intensive study of the Church Fathers. See his *Apologiae*, ed. Mercati.

pro-Western and anti-Ottoman attitude as a solution to the loss of Byzantine clout in the region. This attitude had to do both with his early education in Constantinople as well as with the political developments of his time. By the mid-fourteenth century, Byzantium showed a political weakness determined by the dynastic conflict between the ruling family of the Palaiologoi and the former *megas domestikos* of Andronikos III, John Kantakouzenos. Even after John V had come to power, the internal confrontations continued as his sons, Andronikos IV and Manuel II, contested his rule several times.

Externally, the second half of the fourteenth century marked a change in the balance of power in the eastern Mediterranean. The rise of the new dynasty of the Ottomans led to a series of events that further weakened the Byzantines' authority. Faced with the Ottoman advancement, Emperor John V initially set up alliances with the Latin West. For at least the first two decades of his reign, until the 1370s, he strengthened relations with the papacy and other western states. Intense diplomatic activity was deployed in order to secure financial and military assistance. However, the western aid was insufficient, and John V turned to a policy of reconciliation with the Ottomans.

If the political events of the fourteenth century left deep traces in Kydones' letters, it is equally true that they were also shaped by the intellectual milieu of the latter half of the century. The major debate that took place in the mid-fourteenth century regarded the Orthodoxy of hesychasm, a Byzantine religious movement which in the fourteenth century became highly popular under the leadership of Gregory Palamas. As the Palamites acquired influence in Byzantium, a group of learned individuals, among whom there were many who favored a union with the Church of Rome, expressed their opposition. Furthermore, with the increase in contact with the Latin West, more Byzantine *literati* became familiar with their theology and the Latin language. After several initial attempts in the early fourteenth century, the latter half of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth century saw a flurry of translations of authors such as Thomas Aquinas or St. Augustine. In this process, Kydones played a leading role. It was under his coordination that the Catholic liturgy was translated into Greek and, on the basis of these translations, pro-union Byzantine learned men and theologians composed polemical treatises.[5]

A further aspect of the Palaiologan intellectual milieu that influenced Kydones' letters was the revival of *theatra*.[6] Sometimes the emperors themselves were involved in organizing and chairing the *theatra*, yet, significantly,

5 Angold, *Byzantium and the West 1204–1453*, p. 71.

6 On the late Byzantine *theatron* see Medvedev, "The So-Called Θέατρα"; Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, pp. 17–53; Toth, "Rhetorical Theatron".

John V showed little interest in supporting rhetoricians at court, as he was more concerned with the practical side of state administration. The *theatra* were places of social and literary performance where authors used to recite their literary productions and received (or not) the appreciation of their peers. Although letters were intended for individual recipients, they were often recited publicly – a situation which facilitated the circulation of political messages. There is a lot of evidence concerning the Palaiologan *theatra* coming from numerous letter collections of the Palaiologan period.[7] In his letters, Kydones himself alludes to the organization of several such *theatra*.[8] One of his letters mentions the meetings he organized at his house with people interested in the "Roman wars" and Greek history, especially Thucydides.[9]

Last but not least, one also has to look at the general features of the Palaiologan literary writing. By and large, Palaiologan authors showed a marked interest in political realities and included details on the contemporary events in their writings. The letters of this period fit this pattern. As Margaret Mullett noted, late Byzantine letters were "more open and descriptive" and Palaiologan "writers were closer to events than their predecessors, so there was a fusion between public and private".[10]

Kydones was a prominent member of the intellectual milieu of fourteenth-century Constantinople and towards the end of his life he played the role of mentor for several younger scholars.[11] He was a man of vast learning, and, during the latter half of the fourteenth century, one of the most prolific ones. During his youth in Thessaloniki he had as teachers the theologian Neilos Kabasilas (d. 1363) and the future patriarch Isidore Boucheir (1347–1350). Later, when he came to Constantinople, as he mentions in one of his *Apologiae*, he showed an interest in Latin theology.[12] As was stated, he translated the works of Latin theologians, and composed several texts in which he presented his political and religious views.[13] In the four *Apologiae*, which constitute an

7 See Chapter 13 in this volume.

8 E.g., *Letters*, nos. 12 and 40, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 38–40 and 73–74.

9 *Letters*, no. 98, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp 134–36.

10 Mullett, "Epistolography", p. 887.

11 His learning and mentorship were appreciated by contemporary intellectuals, both Byzantine and Italian, e.g., Manuel Kalekas, Joseph Bryennios, Manuel II, and Coluccio Salutati. On Kydones' place among the late Byzantine elites see Matschke/Tinnefeld, *Die Gesellschaft*, pp. 300–30.

12 Demetrios Kydones, *Apologia* 1, ed. Mercati, pp. 359–403.

13 For a comprehensive list of Kydones' writings see the introduction in Demetrios Kydones, *Letters*, trans. Tinnefeld, vol. 1, pp. 62–74. In addition to his literary and rhetorical output, Kydones authored several *prooimia* with ideological undertones to official documents; see Hunger, *Prooimion*, p. 39, n. 98 and *passim*.

important source for the study of late Byzantine politics,[14] he justified his own actions and opinions.

3 Kydones' Letters: General Parameters

With this background material in mind, let us now proceed to the examination of the letters. Kydones' voluminous epistolary collection presents a great diversity both in styles as well as in subject matters which range from personal to political or theological.[15] Not only is there a great variety of topics and styles but also a multitude of addressees from different walks of life. Demetrios used the letters to communicate both locally, in Constantinople, as well as across territorial borders. His letters had various purposes: sometimes the author requested the protection of influential people, other times he recommended certain individuals whom he considered capable of undertaking specific tasks; sometimes he eulogized the addressees, or used letters as cover texts for gifts of food and books, a common occurrence among Byzantine letter-writers. Some letters were intended for public performance while others were destined to remain secret.[16] However, often the letters were only for the purpose of staying in contact with the addressees. They indicate the strategies whereby Kydones acquired and maintained his political and cultural influence. Arguably, the letters played a special role in his oeuvre: through this epistolary corpus, Kydones, who had already expressed his views on political issues in several orations, gave more thrust to his views by inserting his own self into the master narrative of the fourteenth century.

In terms of its literary aspects, Kydones' letter collection makes use of different rhetorical forms: disguised panegyrics, hortatory orations, and narrative reports. The author mixes learned allusions, complex rhetorical arguments, and personal yearnings. To some extent, the letters reflect the learned epistolary models of the late antique rhetorical handbooks. Like most educated Byzantine authors, the *mesazon* was certainly aware of this tradition, for in the letter collection we find several major types enunciated by Pseudo-Libanios and Pseudo-Demetrios: consolatory, commendatory, friendly, blaming,

14 For a discussion of Kydones' four *Apologiae* as historical sources see Ryder, *The Career and Writings*, pp. 42–46.

15 A detailed overview of Kydones' letter collection (topics, addressees, and style) can be found in Tinnefeld, *Die Briefe des Demetrios Kydones*. For modern language translations see Demetrios Kydones, *Selected Letters*, ed. and trans. Cammelli; and Demetrios Kydones, *Letters*, trans. Tinnefeld.

16 See Ryder, *The Career and Writings*, p. 136.

laudatory, etc.[17] Yet, the impact of these models was rather reduced, for, like other Byzantine letter writers, he used these categories freely in order to suit his occasional purposes.

As for the epistolary style, Kydones tended to use an elaborate manner of conveying his thoughts. He used an Atticizing language with few Latin loanwords[18] but with many classical allusions.[19] Kydones preferred longer letters with a periodic style, although several shorter missives are also present in his collection. Consider Letter 78 (1363) in which Kydones cites criticism of an anonymous addressee who complained about his laconic style. The reason for the criticism was that the friend wanted to know more about his condition, but Kydones replied that he had no time to write.[20] On the contrary, in Letter 182 addressed to Tarchaneiotes, Kydones praised his friend's long letters and asked him to send lots of them.[21]

4 The Addressees

In order to understand the functions of Kydones' letters, an image of their recipients is required. In one of the manuscripts of the letter collection, Kydones himself transcribed the addressees' names, a work that remained incomplete, however.[22] Scholars like Giuseppe Cammelli, Raymond-Joseph Loenertz, and more recently Franz Tinnefeld have done a lot of work to identify the recipients of Kydones' letters.[23] Their research allows us to map his personal social network which, it seems, had a considerable reach. We can thus distinguish several categories of individuals indicating that Kydones had ties with several groups.

Most of the recipients of Kydones' letters were situated in the higher echelons of the political, ecclesiastical, and intellectual elites. Quite often, the

17 See Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*; Malosse, *Lettres pour toutes circonstances*.

18 *Letters*, nos. 31 and 97, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 62, l. 64 and p. 134, l. 54: λεγᾶτος; *Letters*, no. 359, ibid., vol. 2, p. 303, l. 7: περεγρῖνος.

19 For instance in Letter 4 to Agathios, a monk in the Peloponnese, Kydones refers to Sparta and Lacedemonia (ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 26, l. 3: τῶν Λυκούργου νόμων, ὦ σφόδρα Λακεδαιμόνιε σύ). In other cases he grounds his arguments for political action on classical quotations, as in Letter 302 where he uses the ancient Greek poet Theognis (ibid., vol. 2, p. 219, l. 3–12).

20 *Letters*, no. 78, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 111.

21 *Letters*, no. 182, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 54–55.

22 Loenertz, *Les recueils*, pp. 1–2.

23 In addition to Loenertz' edition see the translations by Cammelli (*Selected Letters*) and Tinnefeld (*Letters*).

elite circles whose members he addressed overlapped. Among his correspondents were individuals with different political and religious orientations: some were prominent pro-Unionists like John Kyparissiotes,[24] Constantine Asanes,[25] George the Philosopher,[26] John Laskaris Kalopheros;[27] or supporters of hesychasm like Helena Kantakouzene or Nicholas Kabasilas Chamaetos. A prominent category of recipients of his letters was that of the members of the imperial families, the Kantakouzenoi and the Palaiologoi. It is plausible to assume that these letters represented only a part of the official correspondence dating from the time of Kydones' service as *mesazon*. As was mentioned above, Kydones' father had been in good favor with John VI Kantakouzenos and, as a result, Demetrios tried to maintain these good relations. More than ten letters extolling the emperor's virtues were included in the collection. Kydones continued to stay in touch with Kantakouzenos even after his forced abdication in 1354, as he addressed several letters to him while he was in the monastery of Mangana. Kydones also addressed other members of the Kantakouzenos family: Manuel Kantakouzenos, the Despot of Morea; and Helena, the emperor's daughter and the wife of John V. The connections with the other imperial family of the fourteenth century, the Palaiologoi, are reflected in the letters addressed to John V and his sons, Manuel, Theodore, and Andronikos.

Another category of individuals addressed in these letters were the court officials or people in the emperor's service. These letters show his expertise and influence in court affairs. Among these we can distinguish a certain *megas skeuophylax*;[28] Constantine Asanes, *theios* of John V; Leo Kalothetos, governor of Chios and *protosebastos*;[29] Demetrios Phakrases, *megas primikerios*;[30] Georgios Synadenos Astras, *megas stratopedarches*;[31] John Kalopheros, senator;[32] Demetrios Angelos Manikaites, *katholikos krites*;[33] and George Goudeles, *oikeios* of Manuel II.[34]

The churchmen and theologians form another group of addressees, among whom one finds monks (mostly anonymous), several patriarchs (Isidore Boucheir and Philotheos Kokkinos), and the metropolitan of Thessaloniki,

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24 *PLP*, no. 13900.
25 *PLP*, no. 1503.
26 *PLP*, no. 3433.
27 *PLP*, no. 10732.
28 *Letter* 1, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 24.
29 *PLP*, no. 10617.
30 *PLP*, no. 29576.
31 *PLP*, no. 1598.
32 *PLP*, no. 10732.
33 *PLP*, no. 16635.
34 *PLP*, no. 4334.

Isidore Glabas. Scholars were also among his correspondents: Nicholas Kabasilas Chamaetos, George the Philosopher, John Kyparissiotes, Manuel Raoul Metochites, Tarchaneiotes, Kaloeidas, and even Nikephoros Gregoras. Then, there were several of his disciples such as Manuel Kalekas and Maximos Chrysoberges, both of whom were to become prominent figures in the pro-Unionist movement in the first decades of the fifteenth century. Finally, there are few letters addressed to relatives, including his brother Prochoros Kydones and George Gabrielopoulos, also a relative.[35]

One question that arises by looking at this lengthy collection of addressees is what kind of relations he sought to establish. By and large, the connections were created and developed through common interests in learning, court service, or owing to circumstantial factors (e.g., various requests, recommendations, etc.). The letters unveil both symmetric and asymmetric relations which can be assessed by looking at two levels: on the one hand, the addressees' status and, on the other hand, the level of attention paid to salutations, greetings, or other lexical aspects of the letter that emphasize the importance of power (or the lack thereof).[36] Given that the letters stretch over several decades, in some cases the nature of the relationship can change over time. The evidence present in the letters combined with other contemporary sources suggest that he developed friendships with several individuals who belonged to the intellectual and social elites, e.g., with Rhadenos,[37] George the Philosopher, John Kalopheros, Leo Kalothetos, Francisco Gattilusio, the lord of Lesbos, and later even with the emperor's son, Manuel II Palaiologos.

The letter collection also unveils a number of asymmetrical relationships, some of which reflect unequal balances of power. Thus, he developed a student-mentor relationship with Neilos Kabasilas, his professor in Thessaloniki whom he praised in Letter 378.[38] Then, he established mentor-student relationships apparent in the later letters addressed to Maximos Chrysoberges, Manuel Kalekas and Manuel Palaiologos. The well-documented relationship between Kydones and Manuel is noteworthy, for it stretched over a long period of time and it knew several variations starting from a mentor-student connection to the

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35 For the scarcity of Byzantine letters addressed to relatives see Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 197–200.

36 An example of a letter in which friendship is frequently explicitly expressed is *Letters*, no. 26, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 56, l. 20–21 (to Leo Kalothetos): ἐμέ τε μετὰ τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἐδόκεις φιλεῖν, ὃ καὶ πολλάκις βεβαιοῦν ἠξίωσας ὅρκῳ.

37 Rhadenos, to whom Kydones addresses numerous letters, was a native of Thessaloniki who during the rebellion of Manuel II in 1382–1387 became a close counselor of his (*Letters*, no. 177, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 50–51). See Tinnefeld, "Freundschaft und Paideia".

38 *Letters*, no. 378, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 326–27.

pair becoming friends. As for the patron-client relations, they seem to emerge in the letters addressed to the people who offered him protection and help, such as John VI or Helena Palaiologina Kantakouzene.

5 The Functions of the Letters

As has been noted, in most literate pre-modern societies letters were a versatile instrument of written expression appropriate for a whole range of purposes from the political and personal to philosophical and narrative. In the following section I will try to assess the major functions of Kydones' letters. I will proceed from the basic assumption that letters were primarily instruments of communication and were written to fulfill a need of the sender. Thereby, I will look at the ways and strategies in which social practices as well as personal, political, and religious ideas were embedded in the epistolary communication.[39] Arguably, Kydones' letters fulfilled four major functions: to communicate with friends and close acquaintances on issues of personal life, to address people in power, to provide advice on private and public matters, and to put forward political and theological views.

5.1 *Communication with Friends and Close Acquaintances*

As is indicated by their relative abundance in late Byzantium, letters represented one of the main instruments to begin and nurture closer relations between correspondents, especially when friends found themselves at a geographical distance from each other.[40] To some extent, epistolary writing also partly replaced real conversations. Kydones' letters make no exception to these rules. In a letter, Kydones compares letters to the live communication among friends: "Letters restore the conversation of friends when they are absent."[41] On the other hand, the high number of such letters can be regarded as the effect of Kydones' involvement in Byzantine diplomacy. He was often forced to travel to different regions, especially to Italy, while many of his friends, diplomats, businessmen, or scholars, were often also traveling.

In most of these letters intended for friendly communication Kydones expressed a wide range of emotions including physical pain or pleasure. A topic

39 Certainly, these functions represent only one way of reading this collection. In his monograph on Kydones, Tinnefeld (*Die Briefe des Demetrios Kydones*) offers a different framework of interpretation which privileges the topics approached by the author.

40 See Chapters 10 and 11 in this volume.

41 *Letters*, no. 356, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, p. 299, l. 3–4: Τὰ γράμματα τοῖς ἀποῦσι τῶν φίλων τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς γλώττης ὁμιλίαν ἀναπληροῖ.

that frequently emerged in his letters was that of sickness and health, a pervasive theme in Byzantine epistolography in general.[42] As a matter of fact, several short letters written in friendly terms were addressed to physicians. In Letter 301, sent to a physician, Kydones complains about a toothache and calls him to soothe the pain.[43] In another letter inviting a medic to his place, he describes his pains and his inability to pursue normal daily activities because of it.[44] For Kydones however, illness could be healed not only with medicine but also with the help of a friendly conversation.[45] In another letter Kydones complains of his serious illness which, in addition to the great suffering, made him unable to respond to the attacks of his enemies.[46] As for pleasure, in Letter 81, addressed to a friend, Kydones playfully complains that he (the friend) had sent sour apples. In return, Kydones is sending him much better and sweeter apples. Kydones ends with a comment about the hard times in which they were living: "For beauty is rare anywhere, and also the current year has at times limited the yield of these trees."[47]

Another common theme in the epistolary communication with friends concerns the scarcity of letters. Kydones often included playful charges about the addressees' silence or, conversely, excuses for not writing back in time. In particular, the theme of distance between correspondents surfaces in the letters dating from the latter years of his life when he was even forced to go into exile for a short while. The letters addressed to his friend John Laskaris Kalopheros, a businessman who traveled extensively in Italy, are a case in point. In Letter 269 addressed to him, Kydones voices his hopes that they could spend together the last years of their lives in Venice.[48] This wish is also present in Letter 436 (1391) to the same Kalopheros, where Kydones deplores that he was forced to leave Constantinople. Kydones argues that his lack of a response was not due to negligence, but instead, it was his constant traveling that caused his silence. Therefore, eventually, Demetrios suggests that they find a place where they can live together as friends.[49]

42 See Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 104.

43 *Letters*, no. 301, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, p. 219.

44 *Letters*, no. 240, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 142–43.

45 *Letters*, no. 301, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, p. 219, l. 11–12: ἧκε δὴ πρὸς Θεοῦ, ἢ λύσων τὸ ἄλγος, ἢ τῇ γοῦν ὁμιλίᾳ κουφότερον ἡμῖν τοῦτο ποιήσων.

46 *Letters*, no. 145, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, p. 15.

47 *Letters*, no. 81, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 114, l. 13–14: σπάνιόν τε γὰρ πανταχοῦ τὸ καλόν, καὶ ἅμα ἡ νῦν ὥρα τοῖς δένδρεσι τούτοις τὸν τόκον συνέστειλε.

48 *Letters*, no. 269, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 185–87.

49 *Letters*, no. 436, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 394–96. Later, in another letter to Kalopheros Kydones expresses his desire to meet Kalopheros somewhere in Italy after he had left Cyprus (*Letters*, no. 37, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 70–71).

The same theme is present in letters addressed to other friends as well: Letter 26 is a friendly reminder addressed to Kalothetos to send letters, while in Letter 3 to Agathios he reproaches the lack of letters from his friend. In Letter 144 addressed to Demetrios Doukopoulos Manikaites, a judge in Constantinople, Kydones playfully chides his friend for addressing a common friend, Galaktion, to make him write. Likewise, in Letter 30 to Manuel Raoul Metochites, Kydones apologizes for not writing because he did not want to disturb him from his scholarly activities, due to the great respect he had for him.[50]

Discussion of literary matters was another side of epistolary communication, for occasionally Kydones offered details on some of his works.[51] Letter 213 (1379) is a cover letter for a sermon on St. Laurentios which Kydones sends to Nicholas Kabasilas asking for feedback. The same kind of request for evaluation of a literary text is also present in Letter 287 where Kydones asked for a fair evaluation that would exclude flattery. Similarly, Letter 298 is used as a cover letter for one of his texts. The *mesazon* mentions two reasons why he chose this particular addressee to read his composition: their friendly connections and the familiarity with ancient authors.[52]

As with literature, so with his daily activities, the letters were used to convey personal information. In Letter 217, for instance, Kydones responds to a friend who invited him to a circus show. At other times, Kydones discloses details of his professional life and complains about the difficulties he encountered at court. Most of these letters date especially from the time of his service at the court as *mesazon*. One example is Letter 187 (1375) in which Kydones tells Rhadenos, his friend, that Emperor John V, despite the previous disagreements, was trying to recruit him again to his service. Letter 34 to George the Philosopher speaks of Kydones' resignation from imperial service. Later, in Letter 202 addressed to Rhadenos, Kydones reports on his sojourn in Lesbos at Francisco Gattilusio's residence. In 1382 Kydones went on a diplomatic mission on behalf of John V to Francisco Gattilusio, but there he apparently encountered many difficulties in fulfilling the duties due to the disputes between the emperor and Francisco. On this occasion he described the islanders as being ignorant of the Greek language, and lamented the few opportunities there for scholars to improve their knowledge. In another text, Letter 443, to his friend Chrysoberges, he describes his journey to Venice in 1390.[53]

50 *Letters*, nos. 3, 26, 30, 144, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 25, 55–56, 59–60; vol. 2, pp. 14–15.

51 *Letters*, nos. 25 and 347, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 54–55; vol. 2, p. 287.

52 *Letters*, nos. 213, 287, 298, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 92, 208, 216.

53 *Letters*, nos. 34, 187, 202, 217, 443, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 66–67; vol. 2, pp. 58–60, 78–80, 95–96, 409–11.

Letters to friends also broached more serious issues. At one point he asked for the protection of his friends in dangerous situations, as in the letters addressed to Francisco Gattilusio, the Latin ruler of Lesbos, with whom he had a good relationship. When Kydones left Emperor John V's service in 1371 he found shelter at Gattilusio's residence and asked for protection.[54] Sometimes, in letters addressed to close acquaintances, Kydones spoke about unhappy personal events. In Letter 110 he decries the death of his sisters due to the plague in Constantinople in 1361.[55] In Letter 100 he expresses his sorrow at the death of his friend, George Synadenos Astras. In this letter he asks a physician to send him medicine as a kind of consolation, to help with his suffering: "With your letters send me an ally to fight against the suffering, and prove that there is nothing stronger than your words, not suffering, not grief, not sorrow."[56]

Finally, letters to friends were not always positive in tone. Sometimes he plainly rebukes his friends for neglecting his requests. In Letter 134, Kydones chides his friend, Andreas Asanes, for believing rumors concerning his absence from Constantinople.[57] In another missive he chides the *megas stratopedarches*, Georgios Synadenos Astras, for not asking the emperor for help in the conflict between his brother Prochoros, an Athonite monk, and the Byzantine Church hierarchy. Unlike in other letters, Kydones begins *in medias res* and accuses Astras of passivity despite their friendship, and his easy access to the emperor: "Although you were aware of my brother's troubles and that he was torn into pieces by wild beasts, you continued to enjoy your life."[58]

5.2 *Addressing People in Power*

As has been indicated, Kydones spent over two decades of his life at court and, even after he had given up the position of *mesazon*, he continued to show interest in Byzantine politics.[59] A large number of his preserved letters were addressed to high-ranking individuals with whom he came into contact during his court service: emperors, members of the ruling family, clergymen, and people with court positions. As in the case of other epistolary collections, his letters represented not only instruments of communication but also the means

54 *Letters*, nos. 117, 127, 307, 321, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 155–57, 163–64, 228–29, 250.

55 *Letters*, no. 110, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 148–49.

56 *Letters*, no. 100, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 137–38: πέμψον ἡμῖν ἐν γράμμασι συμμαχίαν κατὰ τοῦ πάθους, καὶ δεῖξον ὡς τῶν σῶν λόγων οὐδὲν ἰσχυρότερον, οὐ πάθος, οὐ πένθος, οὐ λύπη. Similarly, in Letter 363 he eulogizes another dead friend (ibid., vol. 2, pp. 308–09).

57 *Letters*, no. 134, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 3–4.

58 *Letters*, no. 96, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 130, l. 4–5: Ἔγνων τὸν περὶ τὸν ἀδελφόν μοι χειμῶνα, καὶ ὡς ἐκεῖνος μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων ἐσπαράττετο σὺ δὲ ἐτρύφας.

59 E.g., *Letters*, no. 302, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 219–22.

to maintain his political reputation. Given the high-ranking position of the recipients of Kydones' letters, Kydones sometimes used letters as substitutes for public addresses, admonitory panegyrics or encomia. Certainly, during his career he penned public speeches addressed to Emperors John VI – his protector in the first years of career – and John V. However, these speeches did not deal exclusively with specific imperial virtues as panegyrists would ordinarily provide. As a matter of fact, in these speeches, Kydones rather deals with his autobiography and with the general situation of the state, thereby justifying his stance on different political issues.[60]

On the contrary, the epistolary framework appears to have better served Kydones' purpose of eulogizing emperors or other members of the imperial family. Occasionally, praise addressed to people in power was combined with specific requests.[61] They appear as constant attempts to renew his alliance with the ruling families. Due to the fact that the epistolary framework established a direct type of communication, the conveying of messages in Kydones' letters could often have been more efficient than in other public speeches where there were more formal constraints. The 11 letters addressed to John VI Kantakouzenos dating from the years 1343–1354 illustrate this idea.[62] These laudatory texts were put together in a single set even in the letter collection, as if they were intended to be a continuous panegyrical composition.[63] The letters recorded Kydones' admiration for the emperor's deeds at a time when he was still residing in Thessaloniki. He praised in hyperbolic terms Kantakouzenos' victory against the Zealots and compared the times following Kantakouzenos' victory with the ideal state depicted by Plato in his dialogues.[64]

Likewise, in these letters Kydones relied on the imagery commonly used in panegyrics. He extolled Kantakouzenos' omnipotence, his embodiment of the idea of a philosopher-king, and the emperor's conciliatory attitude towards enemies.[65] Then in Letter 8 he compared the emperor with Alexander the Great, and at the end of the letter he showed himself willing to enroll among the emperor's servicemen.[66] In Letter 12 he expresses his desire to be in the

60 See the orations addressed to John VI and John V: *First Oration to John Kantakouzenos*, ed. Loenertz; *Second Oration to John Kantakouzenos*, ed. Cammelli; *Oration to John Palaiologos*, ed. Loenertz.

61 E.g., *Letters*, nos. 132–34, 168, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 1–4, 39–40.

62 *Letters*, nos. 6–16, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 31–45.

63 See below on the formation of the letter collection.

64 *Letters*, no. 6, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 31, l. 16–18: καί σοι συγχαίρουσι τῆς ἀρχῆς καὶ ἔθνη καὶ πόλεις καὶ νῆσοι καὶ ἤπειροι, καὶ τὴν μὲν σὴν φύσιν ὑμνοῦσι καὶ ὅσον πάντων κεκράτηκας ᾄδουσιν.

65 *Letters*, no. 7, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 32–34.

66 *Letters*, no. 8, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 35, l. 33–35: εἰ δὲ καὶ παρὰ σὲ κελεύεις δραμεῖν, νεῦσον μόνον, καὶ τοὺς ἐν τοῖς δρόμοις στεφανουμένους ὄψει με παριόντα.

emperor's proximity.[67] As each letter focuses on a specific set of virtues, this epistolary series suggests that Kydones conceived them as a kind of fully-fledged panegyric. Furthermore, it has been argued that such letters were probably public, given that the Kantakouzenoi cultivated their image of literary patrons as part of their mid-fourteenth century claims to imperial power.[68]

If Kydones took a eulogizing stance towards the emperor John VI and other members of the Kantakouzenos family, his approach to John V was different. Among the letters to John V, only a few have an encomiastic touch. The *mesazon* addressed fewer and significantly shorter letters. The 18 letters Kydones sent to the emperor range from encomiastic ones (Letter 89, 1363) and good wishes (Letter 193, 1373) to allusions to imperial disfavor (Letter 133). In several of them, Kydones goes so far as to rebuke the emperor plainly for delaying the payment of his due salary, arguing that this behavior was not characteristic of an emperor (Letter 70).[69] Certainly, there were several reasons for the scarcity of encomiastic letters to John V. Most of all, Kydones and John V were frequently in close contact in Constantinople or during their diplomatic journeys. Furthermore, while John VI was his family's protector, John V was only a hierarchically superior person.

Other epistolary encomia of notice were embedded in the letters addressed to Helena Kantakouzene, the wife of John V and daughter of John VI Kantakouzenos. In the six letters addressed to her, Kydones takes advantage of their common intellectual pursuits and weaves together the themes of patronage and literary skills. Although she was a supporter of hesychasts, Kydones showed his admiration for the empress' learning.[70] In several letters to Helena he sends his own texts: a translation of a text by St. Augustine and a homily on St. Laurence.[71] Both letters reflect Kydones' close connections with the family of the Kantakouzenoi as well as their common interest for learning. This relation of patronage with the empress is also reflected in another letter from the mid-1370s which accompanied a gift of fruit from his garden. In this letter he suggests that the empress' authority prevails over the emperor's.[72] Given this close relationship, Kydones sought her protection when he faced the emperor's persecutions as a result of his political views regarding an alliance with

67 *Letters*, no. 12, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 38–40.

68 Ryder, *The Career and Writings*, p. 145.

69 *Letters*, nos. 70, 89, 133, 193, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 102, 123; vol. 2, pp. 2–3, 66.

70 Letter 389 (ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 340–41) praises Helena for a speech delivered for her father.

71 *Letters*, nos. 25 (1372) and 256 (1382), ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, 54–55; vol. 2, p. 161.

72 *Letters*, no. 143, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 12–13.

the Latins.[73] Helena's role as protector of the *mesazon* is also underlined by Letter 222 (1392), the longest piece in the collection.[74] This letter can be regarded as a disguised panegyric, for it gives a fully-fledged encomium of the empress' life and deeds.

The largest set in the group of letters addressed to a member of the imperial family are those to Manuel Palaiologos, John v's son, who was to become emperor in 1391. Their relationship is well documented. Kydones addressed no fewer than 80 letters to him, while from the emperor's letter collection we have about 20 missives addressed to Kydones. This intense correspondence indicates that their relationship went beyond a mere emperor-serviceman kind of connection. Very probably, at some point during his years of service at court, Kydones was Manuel's mentor. Demetrios often addresses the imperial offspring in eulogizing terms which praise his speeches.[75] Nevertheless, more often than not, Kydones' letters include other topics as well: discussions of ongoing political processes, literary texts, or exchanges of books. Such letters suggest that Kydones exercised a high level of influence over Manuel. It is likely, as he had foreseen that Manuel was to play an important role in the empire after John v's death, that Kydones was trying to make the most out of their relationship. Their connection was based on the fact that Demetrios had previously played the role of mentor and from this position he was advising him on various matters, including his relationship with his father John v. In other letters, he also kept him up-to-date with the developments in Constantinople while he lived in exile.

Kydones was also in contact with other members of the ruling family. He certainly had better relations with some of the members of the Kantakouzenos family. The letters to Manuel Kantakouzenos and to Matthew Kantakouzenos in 1346–1349 unveil their relationship, as Kydones repeatedly urged them to send more letters. For Theodore Palaiologos, Despot of Mystras (1382–1407) and youngest brother of Manuel Palaiologos, Kydones appears to have had a particular affection. He praises his military virtues and, as Theodore moved to the Peloponnese to become the Despot, Kydones urged him to turn into a Lykourgos, the legendary legislator of Sparta.[76] In another letter he eulogizes his virtues as public speaker, counselor, and general.[77] As for John v's most rebellious son, Andronikos iv, who had twice usurped the Byzantine

73 *Letters*, no. 134, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 3–4.

74 *Letters*, no. 222, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 103–10.

75 E.g., *Letters*, nos. 82 (1388–1390), 262 (1383), 304 (1385), ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 114–16; vol. 2, pp. 166–70, 223–24.

76 *Letters*, no. 251, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, p. 157, l. 32: ἐνθυμοῦ δὲ καὶ τὴν Σπάρτην καὶ τὸν Λυκοῦργον.

77 *Letters*, no. 336, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 271–72.

throne, Kydones' collection includes a single letter in which he expresses his disapproval of the attempts to overthrow his father.[78]

Kydones addressed not only members of the ruling families but also other individuals with high ranking court positions. In Letter 357, sent to the *mesazon* George Goudeles, he recommends Theodore Kaukadenos as a very capable teacher.[79] In Letter 28 (1371) Kydones asks the *megas domestikos* Demetrios Palaiologos (1357–1375) to convince Emperor John V to return to Constantinople after his journey to Italy in search of Latin aid. The request, couched in encomiastic terms, came at a time when the relations between Kydones and the emperor were rather tense because the plans for an alliance between the Byzantines and the Latins had failed. Kydones' justification for sending the request to Demetrios Palaiologos was that he was a relative of the emperor and they had previously traveled together in Italy.[80] In several other letters addressed to court ministers he asks for his due salary. In Letter 245, for instance, addressed to a financial officer, he criticizes the delay in his due payment.[81]

Finally, the conflict between his brother Prochoros, a monk on Mount Athos and an anti-Palamite, and the higher levels of the Church prompted Kydones to address several letters to high-profile ecclesiastics. In 1372, after his brother's death, Kydones sent a letter to the *didaskalos ton didaskalon* Theodore Meliteniotes, who in 1368 had signed the act of Prochoros' excommunication because of heresy. In the letter Demetrios praised Prochoros, for whom he was preparing a commemoration, but chided Meliteniotes for his role in the process of excommunication.[82] Kydones also addressed a letter to Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos criticizing his stance in Prochoros' excommunication which, according to him, was based on false accusations.[83] Yet, despite the conflict with a part of the church hierarchy, several letters reveal that he had better relations with other members of the Constantinopolitan clergy. Letter 360 (1386), for instance, addressed to a hegoumenos of a monastery in Constantinople, is a letter of recommendation for a youth.[84]

78 *Letters*, no. 154, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 23–25.

79 *Letters*, no. 336, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 300–01. On Kaukadenos see *PLP*, no. 11561.

80 *Letters*, no. 28, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 57–58.

81 *Letters*, no. 245, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 148–49. The same criticism is present also in Letter 407, ibid., p. 362, l. 11–12: ἀκούσεται βασιλεὺς ὡς μόνος στεροίμην τῆς παρ' αὐτοῦ δωρεᾶς.

82 *Letters*, no. 151, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 20–22.

83 The attacks against Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos for the treatment of Prochoros are present not only in his letters (e.g., *Letters*, no. 129 (addressed to the Patriarch himself), ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 151) but also in his *Epistolary Speech to Patriarch Philotheos*, ed. Mercati.

84 *Letters*, no. 360, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 304–05.

5.3 *Imparting Advice*

Along with the communication with friends or addressing people in power, giving advice was a major staple of Kydones' texts. Advice was equally imparted to friends and to people in the political hierarchy. In Letter 35, addressed to the anti-Palamite and admirer of Nikephoros Gregoras, John Kyparissiotes, Kydones advises him to return to Constantinople only quietly or to stay away from Constantinople where the Palamites had become too influential. Kydones urged Kyparissiotes to continue the study of philosophy and move to Cyprus or even to Italy where he could take advantage of his contacts with the learned men living there.[85] Indeed, eventually, Kyparissiotes moved to Italy and only later, in 1379, did he return to Constantinople. Similarly, in a letter to his friend John Laskaris Kalopheros, Kydones advised him to go to Italy and leave Cyprus, for good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες) lived there.[86]

More often, one encounters advice that involves behavior in certain complicated political and social circumstances. In a letter from 1372, Kydones advised the *megas primikerios* Demetrios Phakrases to make use of the local δυνατοί (the powerful) in the defense of Thessaloniki against a Turkish offensive. In particular, he urged him to warn the notables "that the current situation is not an opportunity for gaining some benefit, nor should they further provoke those who are desperate".[87] The advice addressed to Manuel II Palaiologos, particularly during his stay in Thessaloniki (1382–1387), deserves special attention as we can also assess the impact of Kydones' letters. Kydones constantly tried to steer Manuel towards closer relations with the west.[88] Sometimes, advice is expressed through critical remarks. Kydones' Letter 302 is a response to a letter by Manuel II Palaiologos from 1385.[89] Manuel, at that time ruler of Thessaloniki, reported on an embassy to Pope Urban VI who, he believed, could have provided assistance to the Byzantines besieged by the Ottomans. Manuel argues, that, due to the lack of resources, he was forced to send as ambassadors people who lacked the necessary skills for negotiating. However, in his letter of response Kydones rebuked Manuel for not informing him before, and for sending the wrong people on that embassy. Kydones' opposition to Manuel's poorly prepared embassy was concerned with the fact that Manuel

85 *Letters*, no. 35, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 67–68.

86 *Letters*, no. 37, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 70–71.

87 *Letters*, no. 77, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 110, l. 28–29: μέγα δὲ τὸ καὶ τοῖς μείζοσι συμβουλεύειν μὴ κερδῶν εἶναι καιρὸν τὰ παρόντα, μηδὲ τοὺς ἀπειρηκότας προσερεθίζειν.

88 *Letters*, nos. 302, 308, 313, 318, 320, 327, 334, 335, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 219–22, 230, 239–40, 245–47, 249–50, 257–58, 269–71.

89 Manuel II Palaiologos, *Letters*, no. 8, ed. and trans. Dennis, pp. 20–23.

had sent two Orthodox monks, Pothos and Euthymios, known for their austere lifestyle, something which he had already criticized in previous letters.[90]

Other letters of advice were addressed to high-ranking individuals whom he tried to persuade on several specific issues. Letter 114 (1372) to a courtier of John V records his reaction to the dangers linked to the growing impoverishment of a part of the population. Kydones criticizes those who write orations against the poor and urges the addressee to make known the abuses against a part of the population, and concludes that an orator has a great responsibility when speaking in public.[91] In another letter addressed in 1371 to the *megas domestikos* Demetrios Palaiologos, who had moved to Thessaloniki in the service of Manuel Palaiologos, Kydones urges him to become Manuel's adviser, a sort of Nestor close to Agamemnon. From this position he was called to advertise the idea of the necessity to have closer connections with the Latins.[92]

5.4 *Reflections on Political Events and Religious Matters*

As a high-ranking court official, Kydones was actively involved in decision-making processes. His actions were grounded in the belief that Byzantium, while faced with the Ottoman advancement, could find protection only in a rapprochement with the Latins. This conviction, which he shared with other members of the political elite, was expressed in several texts with a wider circulation, such as the *De subsidio Latinorum*, *De non reddenda Gallipoli* or his *Apologiae*.[93] References to the political situation, which indicate his awareness of the empire's dire straits, are pervasive not only in his orations but also in his letters. His political beliefs were further strengthened by religious principles, for, as mentioned above, he converted to Catholicism and was actively involved in translating Latin theological texts. The pervasiveness of such references suggest that Kydones sensed that letters represented effective tools of political mobilization. Concurrently, the letters allow us to look more closely at Kydones' attitude regarding the developments in the Eastern Mediterranean at the turn of the fifteenth century.

Thus, Kydones' constant and enthusiastic backing of western assistance found an echo in many letters. The idea that underpinned his attitude was that the Greeks and Latins form a single people, a notion that was to be further developed by other Byzantine authors in the years to come. In the early letters, he

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90 Loenertz, "Manuel Paleologue et Demetrius Cydones", pp. 107–09.

91 *Letters*, no. 114, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 152, l. 32: καὶ δεῖξον ὅσον ὄφελος ῥήτορος μετ᾽ εὐνοίας ἐν πόλει δημηγοροῦντος.

92 *Letters*, no. 106, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 144, l. 18–19.

93 On these texts see Ryder, *The Career and Writings*, pp. 43–46.

appears to be involved in the negotiations for a projected large-scale crusade in the attempt to thwart an Ottoman invasion. Kydones' association with the crusade as the emperor's representative is suggested by Letter 93 (1364), addressed to Simon Atoumanos, metropolitan of Thebes, and written at a time when Constantinople was witnessing the rise of the Ottoman dynasty.[94] In this letter, Kydones takes the opportunity to emphasize the need for a swift intervention of the western states in the Eastern Mediterranean to avoid a disaster.

In other letters Kydones shows awareness of the activities of the papal legates in Constantinople, men such as Philip de Bindo[95] and Peter of Cyprus.[96] Kydones was also aware of the Latins' actions in other parts of the empire as well. In a letter to Theodore Palaiologos, Despot of Morea, he states that he should be careful when fighting against his own people and the Latins established there.[97] Nevertheless, the attitude towards the Latins is not always positive as he criticizes the Venetian behavior,[98] and the Genoese,[99] who had a good relationship with the Ottomans.

In contrast to his positive stance towards the Latins, Kydones held a negative attitude vis-à-vis the Ottomans.[100] In his early Letters 46 and 47, both addressed to George Astras, Kydones only hinted about the threats presented by the Ottomans who, by that time, were making advances in the region;[101] in Letter 78, however, addressed to a friend in 1363, he makes a direct reference to the potential dangers which the second city of the empire might incur from the Ottomans.[102] The "infidels" are seen as propagating "slavery and death"[103] and the Byzantines must resist them at any price.[104] The Ottomans are further portrayed as predators who cause poverty to the Byzantine population[105] while their goal is to control the entire region of the eastern Mediterranean.[106]

94 *Letters*, no. 93, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 127, l. 77–78: τοσαύτης ἐπὶ τὴν Ἀσίαν, ὡς λέγεται, στρατιᾶς διαβησομένης.

95 *Letters*, nos. 31 and 110 (both to George the Philosopher), ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 60–62, 148–49.

96 *Letters*, nos. 93 (to Atoumanos; 1364) and 325 (to Kalopheros), ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 125–28; vol. 2, p. 255.

97 *Letters*, no. 313 (1385), ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 239–40.

98 *Letters*, no. 71 (to Asanes), ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 102–03.

99 *Letters*, no. 443 (to Chrysoberges), ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 409–11.

100 In Letter 13 (ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 40–42) he celebrates Kantakouzenos' victory with the help of the Ottomans.

101 *Letters*, nos. 46–47, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 79–81.

102 *Letters*, no. 78, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 111.

103 *Letters*, no. 63, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 96, l. 21–22.

104 *Letters*, nos. 31 (to George the Philosopher) and 106 (to Demetrios Palaiologos; 1371), ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 60–62, 143–44.

105 *Letters*, no. 103 (to Simon Atoumanos), ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 139–41.

106 *Letters*, no. 93 (to Simon Atoumanos), ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 125–28.

Along these lines, Kydones rebukes those trying to reach agreements with the Ottomans, an allusion to the policy that John V was starting to put into place after 1370.[107] In another letter, Kydones is outraged by the positive attitude of some of the Byzantines towards the Ottomans.[108] Later, in a letter written in the winter of 1376/77, Kydones summarized the detrimental consequences of this situation for Byzantium:

> The old scourge, the Turks, roused to arrogance by the alliance which they concluded with the new Emperor against his father, have become more oppressive for us. Thus they received Gallipoli as compensation for this and seized many other things belonging to us and exacted such an amount of money that nobody could easily count it. Still, they claim that they are not sufficiently paid for their aid.[109]

Kydones also often assesses the impact that the Ottomans' interventions in the region had on the Byzantines' lives. At one point, he remarks that the rise in the tribute levied by the Ottomans from the Byzantines will ultimately provoke the collapse of the state.[110] In addition, the letters show that Kydones was surprised that a part of the Byzantine population adopted a positive attitude towards the Ottomans. This happened later in the 1380s, when Kydones remarked bitterly that the Byzantines thought that obedience to the Ottomans would bring them freedom.[111]

It is not only the political views that are embedded in his correspondence, but also the religious ones which, nevertheless, are expressed less frequently. This phenomenon is surprising, for Kydones engaged in several debates over his religious beliefs that led him eventually to convert to Catholicism in 1357. Already in one of his early *Apologiae* Kydones underlined the common theological background of the Byzantines and the Latins, noticing that their separation was somehow artificial.[112] Moreover, the trial of his anti-hesychast brother, Prochoros, offered him the opportunity to speak in favor of the pro-Latin ideas they both supported. For instance, in Letter 99, Kydones asserts his

107 *Letters*, no. 117 (to John V), ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 155–57. See also Ryder, *The Career and Writings*, p. 154.

108 *Letters*, no. 324 (to Rhadenos), ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, p. 254, l. 39–42.

109 *Letters*, no. 167, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, p. 38, l. 13–17: τό τε γὰρ ἀρχαῖον κακόν, οἱ Τοῦρκοι, βαρύτεροι γεγόνασιν ἡμῖν, ἐπαρθέντες τῇ συμμαχίᾳ ἣν τῷ νέῳ βασιλεῖ κατὰ τοῦ πατρὸς συνεμάχησαν. ὥστε καὶ τὴν Καλλίπολιν μισθὸν ταύτης λαβόντες καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ προσπαραλαβόντες τῶν ἡμετέρων καὶ προσέτ' ἀργύριον ὅσον οὐδ' ἄν τις ῥαδίως ἀριθμῆσαι πραξάμενοι, οὔπω φασὶν ἄξιόν τι τῆς βοηθείας κομίσασθαι. Translation by Charanis, "Internal Strife", pp. 297–98.

110 *Letters*, no. 167, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 37–39.

111 *Letters*, nos. 320 and 442, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, p. 249, l. 10–14; p. 407, l. 39–40.

112 Demetrios Kydones, *Apologia* 1, ed. Mercati, p. 401.

support for a friend who was apparently persecuted by Patriarch Philotheos.[113] Some letters also included the theme of the common Christian doctrine that unite both the Orthodox Byzantines and the Catholic Latins.[114]

In several letters Kydones argues for the superiority of the western Latin theology. For instance, in Letter 34 addressed to his friend, George the Philosopher, he affirms his support for a union with Rome and describes the Palamites' actions as unacceptable.[115] Occasionally he portrays the hesychasts, in rather disparaging terms, as "people with beards"[116] or pseudo-initiates who make no use of reason.[117]

Noticeably, Kydones often expressed his admiration of Thomas Aquinas' philosophy and theology. Alongside the many translations from his works into Greek, Letter 33 addressed to George the Philosopher is in praise of Aquinas in response to some problems previously raised by George. The letter contrasts the darkness of myths (cultivated by Plato) to the clarity of Aquinas' philosophy underpinned by his scholastic method.[118] Another encomium to Thomas Aquinas is to be found in a letter addressed to Maximos Chrysoberges who was praised for undertaking study of this philosopher. In the same letter Kydones proceeds to make his defense of the scholastic method.[119] Such intense praise for the Western medieval scholastic philosopher's high level of theological argumentation had to do with Kydones' interest in translating several theological treatises by Thomas Aquinas.[120]

On the other hand, one finds letters that reflect his attempts to maintain good relations with individuals holding a strict Orthodox position. Some letters indicate that Kydones wished to act as a patron at monasteries on Mt. Athos.[121] The letters to John Kantakouzenos, Helena Kantakouzene, Nicholas Kabasilas, and Patriarch Isidore demonstrate that he sought some kind of reconciliation with the Orthodox church. Letter 378 addressed to Neilos Kabasilas, his mentor in Thessaloniki, is a case in point, as Kydones makes use of affectionate language.[122] Similarly, in the letters to his mentor's nephew, the theologian

113 *Letters*, no. 99, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 136–37.
114 *Letters*, no. 103, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 139–41.
115 *Letters*, no. 34, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 66–67.
116 *Letters*, nos. 50 (to Kasandrenos) and 88, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 84–85, 121–22.
117 *Letters*, nos. 30 (to Raoul Metochites) and 116 (to Manikaites), ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 59–60, 153–55.
118 *Letters*, no. 97, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 132–34.
119 *Letters*, no. 333, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 266–68.
120 See Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas*, pp. 63–82.
121 *Letters*, nos. 108 and 156, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 145–46; vol. 2, pp. 27–28.
122 *Letters*, no. 378, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 326–37.

Nicholas Kabasilas, he seeks to avoid any reference that might have caused a theological debate.[123]

Remarks on the state of the society are also pervasive. In particular, he notices the dissensions between different social or interest groups and the growing gap between the poor and the rich in Byzantium. In Letter 114 addressed to an official at John's court, Kydones criticizes the tax policies implemented by the Byzantine rulers, which, he argues, has harmed the entire society.[124] Letter 93 gives an account of the conditions in Constantinople in 1364, describing popular disillusionment with the west's failure to offer sufficient support.[125] The corruption and machinations of imperial courtiers were the theme of another letter from 1386. Previously, Kaukadenos had lost his position because of the influence of "insolent people who sought to increase their own possessions at the expense of the empire".[126] The inner dissensions in Constantinople are also described in a letter from 1391:

> And within the City the citizens, not only the ordinary, but indeed also those who pass as the most influential in the imperial palace, revolt, quarrel with each other and strive to occupy the highest offices. Each one is eager to devour all by himself, and if he does not succeed, threatens to desert to the enemy and with him besiege his country and his friends.[127]

Frequently, Kydones referred in detail to the situation of his home town, Thessaloniki. As mentioned, in 1382, Manuel Palaiologos moved to Thessaloniki and established himself as governor of the city, in defiance of his father's strategic choice to make peace with the Ottomans. As a result, Emperor John V began to persecute the Constantinopolitans who were in favor of Manuel's operations.[128] In Thessaloniki, however, the negotiations between Manuel and

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123 *Letters*, nos. 87, 124–26, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 120–21, 161–63.

124 *Letters*, no. 114, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 152, l. 19–20: καὶ τὴν πατρίδα καὶ τὸ κοινὸν τούτοις νομιστέον συγκινδυνεύειν.

125 *Letters*, no. 93, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 125–28.

126 *Letters*, no. 357, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, p. 300, l. 16–17: τοῖς ἐπιπολάζουσι καὶ τοῖς ἐξ ὧν τὴν βασιλείαν ἠδίκουν τοὺς ἰδίους αὔξουσιν οἴκους.

127 *Letters*, no. 442, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 407–08, l. 51–56: τὰς δὲ ἔνδον τῶν πολιτῶν, οὐ τῶν τυχόντων ἀλλ' ἤδη καὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις νομιζομένων μεγίστων πρὸς ἀλλήλους στάσεις τε καὶ φιλονεικίας καὶ τὰς ὑπὲρ τῶν πρωτείων ἔριδας καὶ ὡς ἑκάστῳ σπουδὴ εἰ δύναιτο μόνῳ πάντα καταφαγεῖν καὶ ὡς εἰ μὴ τοῦτο λάβοι ἀπειλεῖν πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους αὐτομολήσειν, καὶ μετ' ἐκείνων τήν τε πατρίδα καὶ τοὺς φίλους πολιορκήσειν. Cf. the translation in Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins*, p. 142.

128 See *Letters*, nos. 247 (to Manuel II in Thessaloniki; 1382) and 264 (to John Asanes in Euboea), ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 150–51, 173–77.

the papacy made some of the city elites, including the hesychast monks, oppose Manuel's strategy.[129] Kydones further highlights the dissensions between different social strata which resulted in the failure to resist Ottoman attacks and the ruined state of Thessaloniki.[130]

Surprisingly, less prominent in his correspondence are the references to the dynastic conflicts that opposed Andronikos IV and his son John VII on the one hand, and the rest of the Palaiologos family on the other hand. In Letter 442 (1391), Kydones pointed out that the conflict between John VII and Manuel II strengthened the Ottoman position with respect to Byzantium.[131]

6 The Letter Collection

If so far I have dealt with the letters as individual units, in the following section I will briefly examine the letter collection as a whole, considering how it was designed and how it was transmitted. As in other cases of Byzantine letter-writers, it was the author himself who put together selected letters for publication.[132] The letters were transmitted in several ways. In particular, we are fortunate to have an autograph manuscript, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 101, which contained many of Kydones' letters. Another manuscript, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. gr. 133, represents the final copy of Kydones' letters. These two manuscripts mirror the author's efforts to select and, in many cases, to correct or make additions to the original letters, as most letters were partly or totally re-written. While most of Kydones' letters (319) are preserved in these two manuscripts, there were also other ways in which letters were transmitted, since, in some cases, the recipients themselves circulated the letters they received from Kydones.[133]

Raymond-Joseph Loenertz, the editor of the corpus, identified two phases in the construction of the letter collection.[134] The first stage took place around 1373 when Kydones, after leaving John V's service, enjoyed a period of tranquility in which he revised and published a first group of letters. Versions of these letters have been preserved in manuscripts such as London, British Library, Burney 75,[135] which contains letters prior to 1374. Thereafter, he continued to

129 *Letters*, no. 30, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 60, l. 35–40.

130 *Letters*, nos. 273 (to Rhadenos in Thessaloniki; 1384) and 299 (to Manuel Palaiologos; 1384), ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 190–92, 216–18.

131 *Letters*, no. 442, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 406–08.

132 See Tinnefeld, "Zur Entstehung von Briefsammlungen" and Chapter 17, pp. 477–89 in this volume.

133 E.g., the letters to Nikephoros Gregoras and Nicholas Kabasilas Chamaetos.

134 Loenertz, *Les recueils*, p. 81.

135 Ibid., p. 29.

collect his letters in thematic and chronological groups which he included in the autograph manuscript Vat. gr. 101. Only 20 years later, around 1391, he began to work on the publication of certain shorter groups of selected letters, today preserved in multiple manuscripts. Finally, with the help of his student, Manuel Kalekas, he transcribed into a single manuscript (Vat. Urb. gr. 133) all the letters which he had already revised in Vat. gr. 101 and began to add the names of the addressees, a task he did not complete. In addition, he commissioned Manuel Kalekas to copy several selected letters into a different manuscript. Later, in the fifteenth century, in the Constantinopolitan monastery of Xanthopouloi, two scribes, Joasaph and Nathanael, put together several letters of Kydones and of his friend Nicholas Kabasilas.

The study of the manuscripts containing the letters indicates that in the process of creating his letter collection, Kydones made changes to the original texts.[136] Most pieces in the Vat. gr. 101 indicate Kydones' later editing work, and even the final copy of Urbin. gr. 133 bears the traces of his later interventions. Although the extent of the corrections is often limited, there are cases when letters were entirely re-written incorporating the author's interlinear and marginal corrections.[137] Furthermore, the study of the letters intended for publication by Kydones allows us to look in more depth at the author's intentions. Seemingly, he intended to convey the image of a strong relationship with the ruling families of the Kantakouzenoi and the Palaiologoi. This aspect is grounded in the fact that Kydones wished to project the image of an individual with a leading role in Byzantine politics.[138] That is why he constantly sent letters with advice or criticism to the ruler-to-be, Manuel II Palaiologos, or he composed epistolary encomia for John VI Kantakouzenos. His support for the ruling family is further illustrated by Kydones' editorial practices. That is the reason he inserted Letter 222, a lengthy panegyric for Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina written in 1391, into a series of letters corresponding to the years 1381/82 and dedicated to the imperial family.[139]

The letter collection also shows that the author tried to extend his readership. Arguably, the collection represented an additional platform for broadcasting ideas already present in several of his public speeches, such as the *De non reddenda Gallipoli* and *Pro subsidio Latinorum*. The intention to extend his audience is also noticeable in the later letters addressed to Manuel

136 Ibid., pp. 5–7.

137 Ibid., pp. 17–18. See also Hatlie, "Life and Artistry", pp. 83–87.

138 On letter collections as works of self-representation see Riehle, "Epistolography as Autobiography".

139 *Letters*, no. 222, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 103–10. See Loenertz' introductory remarks, ibid., p. VIII.

Kalekas and Maximos Chrysoberges, which signal his attempts to recruit more people with scholarly and theological interests to advertise his ideas. In addition, many manuscripts of his letters were sheltered in the Monastery of the Xanthopouloi where his disciple, Manuel Kalekas, was well known. As a matter of fact, Kalekas' direct involvement in copying and disseminating the letters helps us understand more about the author's intentions. Given that later Kalekas also converted to Catholicism, it is fair to assume that Kydones had the intention of cultivating his image among students who shared his religious and political views and had the potential to advertise them.

7 Conclusion

This examination of Kydones' epistolary corpus has allowed us to discern the major themes and functions embedded in the letters of an important Byzantine intellectual and statesman of the fourteenth century. In addition to the diversity of addressees and topics the author approached, the study has revealed that the letters served different functions: to substitute oral communication with friends, to communicate with people in power, to offer advice, and to unveil his political ideas. The manuscripts of the letters also indicate that Kydones consciously selected, re-elaborated, and circulated selected letters. He included a high number of letters that were meant to prove his close ties with influential statesmen or clergymen.

Having established the core aspects of this epistolary collection, we can now turn to a brief examination of Kydones' personality as letter writer. Owing to the many details which help us map the author's emotional, temporal, and spatial coordinates, Kydones' letters often acquire the coloration of an autobiography in which he moves easily from introspection to the problems of the exterior world. By juxtaposing letters with personal character and letters that approach public matters, he indicates his attempts to fulfill two major social roles. On the one hand, he appears to fit the mold of the high-ranking court officer constantly in motion and sharing some of the imperial charisma. Thus, with the letters Kydones seems to emphasize the prestige he enjoyed at court. For instance, in Letters 31 and 93, Kydones alludes to his influence on the political developments and presents himself as a counselor very close to the emperor, who could speak for John v.[140]

On the other hand, he also conformed to the figure of the scholar constantly elaborating and circulating his texts. Kydones often dealt with literary matters

140 *Letters*, nos. 31 and 93, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, pp. 60–62, 125–28.

and sent books as well as his own compositions to peer scholars. His intellectual skills were acknowledged both by Byzantine scholars and by Italian humanists, among whom Coluccio Salutati calls him *mirandus* and *peritissimus*.[141] The letter collection suggests that Kydones tried to balance these two roles as he claimed influence in both state and intellectual matters. Through the letters, he also maintained the impression of impartiality concerning the court circles, for he not only praised but also rebuked friends or enemies. Although the *mesazon* complained about the hardships involved in the daily court chores, and, concurrently, extolled the benefits of a life of learning for its own sake, often his political beliefs were connected to his scholarly pursuits.

Arguably, one reason for this intense promotion of multiple sides of his personality was that the letters constituted a useful addition to his public texts: speeches, translations, theological treatises. By directly addressing individuals with positions in the state hierarchy, he was able to offer a thorough account of the arguments underpinning his options for closer relationships with the Latins. At the same time, the easy approach he adopted in the relations with people of different opinions renders plausible the idea that Kydones wished to cultivate the representation of someone who preferred concord over conflicts. That is why the image that he used in order to illustrate this conduct must have resonated with many of his contemporaries. In those critical times, it was more appropriate to act as a reed, which "although it bends to the force of wind, it survives and stands upright after the storm passes".[142]

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141 Coluccio Salutati, *Letters*, IX, nos. 13 (to Kydones) and 14 (to Manuel Chrysoloras), ed. Novati, vol. 3, pp. 105–25.

142 *Letters*, no. 53, ed. Loenertz, vol. 1, p. 87, l. 16–19: ἐνθυμοῦ δὲ καὶ τὸν ἡμέτερον πολίτην φιλόσοφον, ὃς τοῖς καλάμοις αὑτὸν εἰκάζων ἔλεγε ζῆν, οἳ μὴ φιλονεικοῦντες πρὸς τοὺς ἀνέμους τηροῦσιν αὑτούς, τῶν δρυῶν καὶ τῶν κέδρων ἀνασπωμένων.

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PART 3

Forms and Functions of Byzantine Epistolography

CHAPTER 6

Epistolography and Rhetoric

Sofia Kotzabassi

1 Rhetoric and Epistolary Theory

Epistolography has one of the longest traditions of any genre in Greek literature. As the only means of communication between people who, due to the distance separating them, could not converse face to face, letter-writing was carried out and cultivated throughout the Byzantine period.

Advice on composing letters is preserved in various handbooks and epistolary guides of the first centuries of the Christian era. This fact alone, that there exist guides to letter-writing and models to help future letter-writers compose their epistles, confirms that the letters that have come down to us are not spontaneous texts in which the writer simply jots down some thoughts or information that he wishes to communicate to the person he is addressing, but are composed texts in which he desires to combine oral speech with the rules of rhetoric. And this is perfectly natural, for while the Byzantines, too, may have believed the letter to be the discourse of absence, another form of conversation between friends, as is observed in later handbooks on rhetoric,[1] it has, being a written form rather than an oral one (such as real conversation), a more permanent nature, and is the object of study, examination and criticism on the part of not only the recipient but also of a wide circle of people. It is, therefore, perfectly natural that a person sitting down to pen a letter would look for assistance in composing it, and that the writer of such handbooks would feel obliged to provide his readers with the necessary guidance.

The letter is thus by its very nature solidly associated with rhetoric, even if the theoreticians of the genre try to assert a looser connection, teaching that the letter must follow a middle path in language and style, neither adhering strictly to oral speech, which as it is impulsive and unrehearsed is often very simple and/or otherwise inappropriate for a written text, nor going to the

1 Ἀπαγγελία γάρ ἐστι καὶ ὁμιλία φίλου πρὸς φίλον ἡ ἐπιστολή. The passage comes from a short chapter on letter-writing interpolated in Gregory of Corinth's *On the Syntax of the Speech* (ed. and trans. Donnet, p. 322), but is included both in Pseudo-Gregory's treatise *On the Four Parts of the Perfect Speech* (ed. Hörandner, p. 106, l. 116–17, trans. ibid., p. 111) and in Joseph Rhakendytes' *Synopsis of Rhetoric* (ed. Walz, p. 559, l. 4–5).

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other extreme and the exaggerations that remove the letter from the context of a friendly communication and transform it into a tedious text. They further advise would-be letter-writers to take pains with their style, but not to the point where it makes the letter abstruse and obscure. The same views are also expressed by Philostratos, whose instructions on the composition of letters, written in the second century AD, are considered to be the earliest.[2]

Gregory of Nazianzos, as has been pointed out,[3] gave his nephew Nikoboulos some interesting advice on letter-writing. A letter must not be wordy, but must be of a length appropriate to the subject. It must be clear and comprehensible to the uneducated as well as the educated person, and distinguished for its elegance. This does not mean, of course, that it must be dry and unadorned; rather, the epistolographer must make use of maxims, proverbs, adages, quips and enigmas, which will add charm to his prose, but do so with restraint. Gregory also recommends the moderate use of figures of speech, but frowns on the use of parison (i.e., exact balance of clauses) and isocolon (i.e., a sentence consisting of equal clauses); and he concludes by urging his nephew to remain as close as possible to natural speech.[4]

Alongside the theoretical guides for epistolographers, there also existed, from the earliest centuries, collections of sample letters meant to serve as patterns for the composition of different types. The oldest such epistolary, the *Epistolary Types* compiled by Pseudo-Demetrios, contains examples of 21 kinds of letters,[5] and was followed by collections of *Epistolary Styles* by Pseudo-Proklos and Pseudo-Libanios.[6] The need for model letters also finds expression in other collections of sample letters preserved in Byzantine manuscripts, such as that in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Barocci 25, fols. 254–257.[7]

The letters of renowned epistolographers of those early centuries were also used as patterns, and they continued to be copied and read until the last centuries of Byzantium. These include the letters of Synesios of Cyrene, Gregory of Nazianzos, and Libanios, and pseudepigraphic collections bearing the names of Phalaris, Brutus, Libanios and Basil of Caesarea. These letters are

2 Philostratos, *Dialexis* 1, ed. Kayser, pp. 257–58.

3 Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 199–200 and Mullett, "Epistolography", p. 884.

4 Gregory of Nazianzos, *Letters*, no. 51, ed. and trans. Gallay, vol. 1, pp. 66–68.

5 Pseudo-Demetrios, *Epistolary Types*, ed. Weichert.

6 Pseudo-Libanios, *Epistolary Styles*, ed. Weichert; ed. Foerster. According to Sykutres, "Proklos, Περὶ ἐπιστολιμαίου χαρακτῆρος", the *ἐπιστολιμαῖοι χαρακτῆρες* by Pseudo-Proklos and Pseudo-Libanios are variations of the same work.

7 The manuscript, dating from the early fourteenth century (see Coxe, *Catalogi codicum*, col. 34), preserves 11 of the at least 17 letters in the initial collection, which are published together with other model letters in the *Epistolarion Compiled from Different Sources*, pp. 49–59.

recommended as models by Patriarch Photios in a letter to Amphilochios of Cyzicus, mentioning by name the letters of Phalaris, Brutus, Marcus Aurelius, Libanios, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzos and Isidore of Pelusion;[8] some of these he also recommends as patterns of epistolography in a later treatise in which the author adds to the list Gregory of Nyssa and Michael Psellos.[9]

The importance the Byzantines ascribed to these epistolographers is also shown by the comparison drawn by one of the distinguished exponents of the genre in the thirteenth–fourteenth century, the *megas logothetes* Constantine Akropolites, at the end of a letter addressed to some *protoasekretis* who surpassed Brutus, Phalaris and Celer in skill at composition.[10] Similarly, Nikephoros Choumnos declares at the beginning of one of his brief (*laconic*) letters: "You praise Brutus and his brevity in writing, and so do I",[11] while Libanios' letters are used as a model by many letter-writers of the Palaiologan period as Michael Grünbart has shown.[12]

The link between rhetoric and epistolography is due not only to the relationship created between them from the beginning, which is necessary to a degree, but also to the progressive penetration of rhetoric into every kind of Byzantine literature, including epistolography. More and more Byzantine scholars followed the rules of rhetoric in the composition of their letters, so as to show off their skill and satisfy their correspondents and the wider circles of those who would read their letters. Evidence of this practice may be found in many letters throughout the Byzantine period.[13] I shall mention two characteristic examples: Michael Psellos describes the public reading of letters as standard practice,[14] while Joseph Bryennios observes that: "As soon as they received a

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8 Photios, *Letters*, no. 207, ed. Laourdas/Westerink, vol. 2, p. 107, l. 10–22 (esp. 13–19).

9 Gregory of Corinth, *On the Syntax of the Speech*, ed. and trans. Donnet, p. 322, l. 246–249: Ἔχεις ἀρχέτυπα εἰς ἐπιστολὰς τὸν μέγαν Γρηγόριον μάλιστα, τὸν μέγαν Βασίλειον, τὸν Νύσσης κομψότερον ὄντα καίτοι νεώτερον, τὸν Συνέσιον μάλιστα, τὸν Λιβάνιον, τὸν Ψελλὸν καὶ εἴ τις τοιοῦτος. See also Pseudo-Gregory, *On the Four Parts of the Perfect Speech*, ed. Hörandner, p. 106, l. 120–22, trans. ibid., p. 111 and Joseph Rhakendytes, *Synopsis of Rhetoric*, ed. Walz, p. 559, l. 10–12.

10 Constantine Akropolites, *Letters*, no. 5, ed. Romano, p. 111, l. 10–11: ὦ καὶ Βροῦτον νενικηκὼς σὺ καὶ Φάλαριν ἐκεῖνον καὶ τὸν περιβόητον ἐν ἐπιστολαῖς Κέλερα.

11 Nikephoros Choumnos, *Letters*, no. 116, ed. Boissonade, pp. 141–42: ἐπαινεῖς Βροῦτον καὶ τὴν ἐκείνου βραχυλογίαν· ἐπαινῶ κἀγώ.

12 Grünbart, "An der Quelle", esp. pp. 41–46.

13 See references to the letters in Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 318–19. For a concise bibliography on the subject see the recent study by Riehle, "Epistolography as Autobiography", p. 1, n. 1.

14 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 497, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 922, l. 32–35: Προσίεμεν οὖν ἀλλήλοις ... τὰς σὰς ἀντεπιδεικνύντες ἐπιστολάς, καὶ ἀντεπέξιμεν ταύταις καὶ ἀντιφιλοτιμούμεθα. Καὶ ὁ τὴν χαριεστέραν ἐπιδεικνύων, οὗτος νικῶν εἰς φιλίαν, ἄπεισιν ("we meet ... and show

letter they showed it to their friends. At first they learned it by heart and copied it into their notebooks. Then their friends took it and copied it into their books and learned it by heart so as to be able to declaim it."[15]

2 Rhetoric and Literary Criticism

The tendency to employ rhetoric in letter-writing is strengthened by the emulation between scholars to compose letters perfect in language and style. In the probably pseudepigraphic epistolary exchange between Libanios and Basil of Caesarea, the former describes a typical incident concerning the reception of one of his letters:

> It would be wrong not to divulge what happened with your fine letter. I was sitting with several of my pupils … when the letter was delivered to me, I read it to myself and said with a smile "I am outdone". "How are you outdone?" they asked, "and does your defeat not bother you?" "I am outdone in beautiful letter-writing" I replied, "and my vanquisher is Basil, and since he is a friend, I am glad".[16]

Many Byzantine epistolographers express their admiration for the letters they receive. "How to describe the delight, most sweet and longed-for master, that the all-wise and mellifluous Siren of your words distilled into my heart?", is

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each other your letters and read them and compete with one another. And whoever presents the most beautiful letter is the winner in this friendly competition"). On the public performance of letters see also Chapter 13 in this volume.

15 Joseph Bryennios, *Letters*, no. 25, ed. Boulgaris, p. 181, l. 25–29 = *Letters*, no. 2, ed. Tomadakes, p. 125: ἅμα τῷ δέξασθαι, τοῖς λόγου μετόχοις εὐθὺς ταῦτ᾽ ἐπεδείκνυον· καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀποστηθίζοντες πρῶτοι, τοῖς ἰδίοις δελτίοις ἐνέγραφον· καὶ οἱ ἐξ ἐκείνων λαμβάνοντες πάλιν, εἰς τὰ ἑαυτῶν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνετίθουν βιβλία, καὶ ἀποστηθίζοντες ἐπὶ ἐπιδείξει. Gregory of Nyssa describes a similar case, of a letter written by his teacher Libanios which he shared with his friends, some of whom memorised it while others copied it; see *Letters*, no. 14, ed. Pasquali, p. 47, l. 6–13; ed. and trans. Maraval, p. 202, l. 14–p. 204, l. 26. For further examples see Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 209–11.

16 Libanios, *Letters*, no. 1583, ed. Foerster, vol. 11, p. 577, l. 1–10 = Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, no. 338, ed. and trans. Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 205, l. 4–23 (German translation in Hunger, *Byzantinische Geisteswelt*, p. 69): ἀλλ᾽ ὅ γε ἐγένετο περὶ τὴν ἐπιστολήν σου τὴν καλήν, οὐ καλὸν σιωπῆσαι. Παρεκάθηντό μοι τῶν ἐν ἀρχῇ γεγενημένων ἄλλοι τε οὐκ ὀλίγοι … ὡς οὖν ἔδοσαν οἱ φέροντες τὴν ἐπιστολήν, σιγῇ διὰ πάσης ἐλθὼν νενικήμεθα ἔφην μειδιῶν τε ἅμα καὶ χαίρων. Καὶ τίνα σὺ νενίκησαι νίκην; ἤροντο καὶ πῶς οὐκ ἀλγεῖς νενικημένος; ἐν κάλλει μὲν ἔφην ἐπιστολῶν νενίκημαι, Βασίλειος δὲ κεκράτηκε, φίλος δὲ ὁ ἀνήρ, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο εὐφραίνομαι.

how Theodore of Cyzicus opens a letter to the emperor Constantine VII.[17] And Constantine Akropolites declares himself thrown into ecstasy by the letter a clerical correspondent sent him, so full of all the graces of the Muses that he cannot describe the emotion with which he read it and the pleasure it afforded him.[18]

"The young man arrived yesterday bringing your marvelous letter, and I took it and read it and was overwhelmed with sentiments of admiration", writes the author of a letter to Theodosios Saponopoulos, who adds that he dashed off a brief note in simple language so as not to send the bearer back without an answer, but is now returning to it to pen a befitting response.[19] In a letter to the *megas logothetes* Theodore Mouzalon, Patriarch Gregory of Cyprus tells him that he will be slow in replying, for he fears, recalling the virtues of the letter he received from him, that he will not be able to write anything comparable.[20]

The Byzantine epistolographers, however, did not confine themselves to expressions of admiration towards their correspondents, but frequently criticized the language and style of a letter received: "There was nothing remarkable about the first letter, which was your first effort", writes the so-called Anonymous professor to Leo Sakellarios.[21] By contrast, in a letter to Theodora Raoulaina Gregory of Cyprus praises her letter to him for its language, content and style, saying: "The letter was excellent … the rhythm of the prose, the intricacy of meaning and the compliance with the rules of the art filled my heart

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17 Theodore of Cyzicus, *Letters*, no. A2, ed. Tziatzi-Papagianni, p. 8, l. 1–3: Πῶς σοι παραστήσω τὴν ἡδονήν, γλυκύτατε καὶ ποθούμενε δέσποτα, ἥν μου πρὸς τὴν καρδίαν κατέσταξεν ἡ πάνσοφός σου καὶ μελισταγὴς τῶν λόγων σειρήν;

18 Constantine Akropolites, *Letters*, no. 23, ed. Romano, p. 123, l. 1–6: Ἐδεξάμην τὴν ἐπιστολήν, θεσπέσιε δέσποτα, ἀλλὰ πῶς ἂν παραστήσαιμι μεθ᾽ ὅσου τοῦ πόθου ἀνειληφώς, μεθ᾽ ὅσης ἀνελεγόμην τῆς ἡδονῆς, οὐ ψιλὴν μόνον δεξάμενος πρόσρησιν καὶ ταύτην ὡς τύχοι προενεχθεῖσαν, Χαρίτων καὶ Μουσῶν ἄμοιρον, ἀλλ᾽ὡς ἔκ τινος Πιερίας ἢ Ἑλικῶνος καταπεμφθεῖσαν Καλλιόπῃ κεκοσμημένην καὶ ταῖς λοιπαῖς τῶν Μουσῶν ἐνωραϊσμένην.

19 Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, no. 64, ed. Eustratiades, pp. 45–46: ἧκέ μοι τὴν πρότριτα ὁ νεανίας τὴν θαυμασίαν φέρων ἐπιστολήν, κἀγὼ δεξάμενος καὶ ἀναγνούς, ὅλος τε αὐτῆς τοῦ θαύματος γεγονὼς … / τότε μὲν ἐπειδήπερ τὸν ὑπηρέτην μετ᾽ ἐπιστολῆς ἥκοντα οὐκ ἦν ἀποπέμπειν κενὸν … ἐπιστόλιόν τι συνθεὶς βραχύ τι καὶ ἀσφαλὲς καὶ δεδημευμένον … ἀπέστειλα, … νυνὶ δὲ καὶ τὴν μείζονα ῥῆσιν ἀνταπέδωκα τῇ ἐπιστολῇ· ὑπερήμερον ἴσως ἐρεῖ τις …, ἀλλ᾽οὐδὲν ἐμοὶ πρᾶγμα μόνον εἰ καλῶς συντέθειται, καὶ κατ᾽ ἴχνος βαίνει τῆς σῆς.

20 Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, no. 117, ed. Eustratiades, pp. 94–95: Τῆς ἀρετῆς τῆς χθές μοι πεμφθείσης ἐπιστολῆς μεμνημένος καὶ πολλὰς ἂν ἡμέρας δοκῶ μοι σιγᾶν καὶ μὴ γράφειν ἐπιστολὰς δειλιῶν μὴ παρὰ πόδας τῆς καλλίστης φθεγγόμενος τὴν τῶν ἐμαυτοῦ ἐπίτηδες αὐτὸς ἀσθένειαν στηλιτεύω. See also Laiou, "The Correspondence of Gregorios Kyprios", p. 99 and Kotzabassi, "Gregorios Kyprios", p. 85.

21 Anonymous professor, *Letters*, no. 25, ed. Markopoulos, p. 18, l. 1–2: Οὐκ εἶχέ τι τῶν σπουδῆς ἀξίων ἡ πρώτη ἐπιστολὴ διὰ τὸ καὶ πρώτην ἐξεργάσθαι πρός σέ.

with great pleasure."[22] The intricacy of meaning that delighted the scholarly patriarch is, of course, far removed from the simplicity demanded by the theoreticians of the early centuries, but that had long been forgotten by the epistolographers of the Palaiologan era.

Gregory's commentaries on his friends' letters are not always positive, but in some cases quite the opposite, as for example in two letters to Manuel Neokaisarites in which he criticizes the letters he received from him.[23] Nor is criticism of language and style reserved for the letters received by practitioners of the art; it is also addressed to their own efforts, indicating the importance they ascribed to rhetoric and its rules. "Read the letter carefully, I beg of you; read it and let me have your opinion", writes Constantine Akropolites to its unknown recipient.[24]

Elsewhere the Byzantines reply to the criticisms of their correspondents on the letters they wrote. Such letters are frequent in the collection of Gregory of Cyprus, while in one letter addressed to Theodora Raoulaina he assures her that he has followed her instructions in composing it: "I have put both nerves and some bones in the letter, as you commanded, since you hinted that it should be more forceful with such words."[25]

3 Rhetoric and the Formation of Letter-Collections

The degree to which rhetoric is employed depends, of course, on the knowledge and personality of the writer. The Byzantine scholar penning a letter, even on a trivial occasion – for example the return of a book he had borrowed or accompanying a gift or in thanks for a gift received – would use every trick of rhetoric he knew to ensure that his letter would meet the literary expectations of his correspondent and of all those who would, very likely, hear it read out in public, but also with the consciousness that he was creating a work of art. This disposition is reinforced by the fact that many Byzantines were accustomed to

22 Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, no. 7 (= no. 206 in Lameere, *La tradition manuscrite*), ed. Kotzabassi, p. 151, l. 1–3: Ἄριστα ἔχον ἔστι τὸ γράμμα, … ὁ γὰρ τοῦ λόγου ῥυθμός τό τε συνεστραμμένον τῶν νοημάτων, καὶ ἡ κατὰ τέχνην συνθήκη, θυμηδίας με πάσης πεπλήρωκεν.

23 See Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, nos. 40 and 41, ed. Eustratiades, pp. 28–9. For these letters and generally for (literary) criticism in Gregory's letters see Kotzabassi, "Gregorios Kyprios", p. 84.

24 Constantine Akropolites, *Letters*, no. 127, ed. Romano, p. 220, l. 1–2: Δίελθε τὸ γράμμα, ἐπιστατικῶς αἰτῶ· δίελθε καὶ ὁποῖον ἄν σοι δόξειε γνώρισον.

25 See Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, no. 14 (= no. 213 in Lameere, *La tradition manuscrite*), ed. Kotzabassi, p. 155, l. 1–3: καὶ νεῦρα κατὰ τὸ σὸν ἐπίταγμα καὶ ὀστᾶ δή τινα ἐμβεβληκέναι φαμὲν τῇ ἐπιστολῇ· διὰ τοιούτων γὰρ ὀνομάτων τὸ δεῖν ἰσχυροτέραν γενέσθαι αὐτὴν ὑπηνίττου.

collect and publish their correspondence, which means that they were interested in their posthumous reputation.[26]

The custom of preparing collections of letters for publication together with the rest of the writer's work, which flourished for many centuries, led some scholars not only to rework some of their letters linguistically and stylistically, perhaps omitting certain names, but also to destroy those which were, in their opinion, not worth keeping.[27] This is typically illustrated by the words of Patriarch Gregory of Cyprus to his friend the *megas logothetes* Theodore Mouzalon, concerning a collection of letters he was intending to publish:

> I wanted to copy all my letters so that they could remain to later generations as an example of the art of discourse, but since they are not all worth keeping I selected, with difficulty, those that are and gave them to the copyist, but I gathered them all up and am sending them to you, as you requested … Please do in turn as I request, and destroy them all so as to lessen the criticism of ignorance leveled against me.[28]

The revision of letters with the removal of certain allusions, especially to persons, so as to give them a general and timeless character may be due not only to their author himself in preparing his collected letters for publication, or to the editor of the collection, but equally to the intervention of another Byzantine scholar who copied them for his own use or as models for later epistolographers. One example of this last case may be seen in the work of the fourteenth-century scholar and epistolographer Matthew of Ephesus, whose compilation of copies of texts, in codex Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Par. gr. 2022,

26 See Gregory of Cyprus' comments in his *Autobiography* about the collection of his own works that he was preparing, and his interest in the opinion of later generations of readers (ed. Lameere, p. 187, l. 12–14): Εἰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ζήλου τι ταῖς ἀληθείαις ἄξιον καὶ λόγου περὶ τοὺς λόγους ἐξεγένετο κατορθῶσαι τῷ συγγραφεῖ, ἤδε που παραστήσει τοῖς ἐξετάζειν βουλομένοις ἡ συγγραφή· καλῶ γὰρ οὕτω νῦν τὴν ἀνὰ χεῖρας πυκτίδα; and p. 191, l. 9–11: ἡ δέ που πυκτίς, ὅπερ καὶ ἄνωθεν ἔφην, καλῶς τὸν πατέρα τοῖς ἀναγινώσκουσι δείξει.

27 On the formation of letter collections see also Tinnefeld, "Zur Entstehung von Briefsammlungen"; Kotzabassi, "Zur Überlieferung von Briefcorpora in der Palaiologenzeit"; and Chapter 17, pp. 477–90 in this volume.

28 Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, no. 157, ed. Eustratiades, p. 151: Ἐβουλόμην μὲν ἐγὼ τὰς πάσας τῶν ἐπιστολῶν χάρταις ἐναπογραψάμενος διαμένειν εἰς τὸν μετέπειτα βίον ἀφεῖναι ὡς δή τινος λογικῆς καλλιτεχνίας ὑπόμνημα· ἀλλ' ὅτι μὴ αὐτὰς ἀξίας τοῦ περιεῖναι καὶ κατείληφα ὡς μετριωτάτας ἀπολεξάμενος, ἐκβιάσας κἀν τούτῳ ναὶ μὴν καὶ τυραννήσας τὸν καταψηφισάμενον λογισμὸν δίδωμι τῷ γραφεῖ …· πλὴν … τὰς πάσας αὖθις σοι ὡς ἡ ὑπόσχεσις πέμπω συνηθροικώς· ἐπεὶ δ' ὑπήκουσα καὶ πέμπω, ὑπάκουσον ἐν τῷ μέρει καὶ σὺ καί μοι χάριν δὸς ἀντὶ χάριτος. Τίς ἡ χάρις; ἀφάνισον τοῦ λοιποῦ τὰς πάσας καὶ τὸν τῆς ἀμαθίας ἐμοὶ μείωσον ἔλεγχον.

includes some letters written by Gregory of Cyprus from which the names of the intended recipients have been removed, while certain other changes, such as the substitution of a masculine for a feminine participle in a letter written to Theodora Raoulaina, are probably the result of his intervention.[29]

4 Rhetorical Composition and Devices

The use of rhetoric may have been a common practice for the Byzantine scholar taking up his pen to write even a brief letter, but there are certain kinds of letters that are more readily susceptible to the use of rhetorical devices. This category includes travel writing in epistolary form,[30] didactic or mimetic letters,[31] while the rhetorical element in letters addressed to the emperor may be so strong as to make them indistinguishable from purely rhetorical discourses.[32]

The care of the Byzantine epistolographer to ensure the literary perfection of his compositions lest they be exposed in the eyes of future readers does not of course mean that the initial function of the letter, that it should resemble the conversation of one person with another, is forgotten. This function is expressed by, among many others, Michael Psellos, who writes in a letter that

> When we are present, we converse personally; when we are absent, with letters. Word and letter correspond in co-existence and separation, but the first is more beautiful. I, of course, prefer the letter. It gives a better image of the friend and shows his state of mind. For simple speech is pronounced at random and does not clearly reveal the speaker. The mode of expression in a letter, however, records the inner make-up of the writer. For where in simple speech are beautiful syntax and harmoniously articulated expression? [Different] kinds of letters exert great charm, and enter more deeply into the soul than it is possible to achieve with words

29 Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, no. 8 (= no. 207 in Lameere, *La tradition manuscrite*), ed. Kotzabassi, pp. 125–26 and 151–52.

30 See, e.g., Synesios of Cyrene, *Letters*, no. 5, ed. Garzya, pp. 11–26; Nicholas Mesarites, *Letter to the Monks of the Euergetis Monastery*, ed. Heisenberg.

31 See Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 205–06. On didactic letters see also Chapter 8 in this volume.

32 See, e.g., Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 142, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 383–86. Psellos' *Panegyrical Orations*, nos. 18–20, ed. Dennis, pp. 175–84 are in some manuscripts preserved as part of his letter collection; see Papaioannou's introduction to his edition of Psellos' *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. xlvii–xlviii, lxx, lxxvi.

> alone. You see, then, how our thinking has elevated this letter and left oral speech far behind.[33]

Constantine Akropolites expresses similar sentiments in the opening of Letter 118:

> I praise the inventor of letters and think that mankind owes him a great debt of gratitude, for letters both bring near in the most admirable manner those who are far away and give those who wish to meet but cannot do so, for whatever reason, the opportunity to converse together. Thus, then, I who have long yearned to meet you but was prevented from doing so by distance and otherwise, am now with you and conversing without fear and saying all that I wish to you without impediment.[34]

A letter may represent a conversation but does not cover all the facets of face-to-face interaction, in which the participants can see each other's gestures and expressions, hear the tone and force of their voice, and so on. But since for the Byzantines a letter is an icon of the soul,[35] the writer of a letter is compelled, if his letter is not to be cold and expressionless, to try to portray his soul and express his state of mind in words. The means he uses are those offered by rhetoric. Manners of expression, figures of speech, metaphors and similes express his frame of mind, often more vividly than in oral interaction.[36] Theodore Stoudites commonly expressed this frame of mind in the opening of his letters

33 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 454, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 873, l. 37–50: Καὶ παρόντες μὲν διὰ τῆς κατὰ πρόσωπον ὁμιλίας, ἀπόντες δὲ δι' ἐπιστολῶν ὁμιλήσομεν· δύο γὰρ δυσὶν ἀποδέδοται, λόγος καὶ γράμμα, ἑνώσει καὶ διαστάσει· τὸ μὲν πρῶτον τῷ πρώτῳ, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν τῷ δευτέρῳ, καλλίονα δὲ τῶν δευτέρων τὰ πρῶτα. Πλὴν ἀλλ' ἐγώ τι τῷ γράμματι πλέον χαρίζομαι· μάλιστα γὰρ τὸν φίλον ἀπεικονίζεται, καὶ τὸν χαρακτῆρα δείκνυσι τῆς ἐκείνου ψυχῆς. Ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἁπλοῦς λόγος κατὰ τὸ ἐπιτυχὸν ἀπαγγέλλεται, καὶ οὐ μάλα σαφηνίζει τὸν λέγοντα· ὁ δ' ἐπιστολιμαῖος τὴν ἐνδιάθετον μορφὴν ἀποτυποῦται τοῦ γράφοντος. Ποῦ δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἁπλαῖς ὁμιλίαις κάλλος ἢ συνθήκη φράσεως, ἢ ἁρμονίας ἐμμελοῦς ἔμφασις; Οἱ δὲ τῆς ἐπιστολῆς τύποι τὰς τοιαύτας ἀναμάσσονται χάριτας· καὶ μᾶλλον εἰσδύνουσι τὰ γράμματα ταῖς ψυχαῖς, ἢ εἴ τις αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα φέρων ἐνήρμοζεν.

34 Constantine Akropolites, *Letters*, no. 118, ed. Romano, p. 214, l. 1–9: Ἐπαινῶ τὸν εὑρόντα τὰ γράμματα καὶ μεγάλας εἰδέναι οἱ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἡγοῦμαι δεῖν χάριτας· καὶ τοὺς τόπῳ γὰρ διεστῶτας θαυμασίως συνάπτουσι καὶ τοὺς ἄλλως μὲν ἐντυχεῖν ἐθέλοντας, οὐκ εὐχερῶς δ' ὁπωσδήποτε ἔχοντας, καὶ ὁμιλεῖν διδόασι καὶ συγγίνεσθαι. Ἰδοὺ γὰρ ὁ ἐκ μακροῦ συνελθεῖν ποθῶν ἔγωγε, τόπου δὲ διαστάσει καὶ διαφόρων τρόπων ἀπείρξει οὐ μικρῶς κωλυόμενος, μονονοὺ παρὰ σοὶ γέγονα καὶ ἀδεῶς ὁμιλῶ καὶ ἀκωλύτως τὸ πρὸς βούλησιν παριστῶ.

35 Karlsson, *Idéologie et ceremonial*, pp. 94–96; Littlewood, "'An Icon of the Soul'".

36 Unfortunately there are too few systematic studies of figures of speech in Byzantine epistolography to permit a global assessment. For a full and detailed examination of their

to his mother Theoktiste: "Were it possible to convey tears with words, sweet and respected and much-longed-for mother, I would fill a letter with them and send it to you at this time."[37]

Through rhetoric the letter-writer expresses his feelings towards the recipient and his pleasure at conversing with him in this way. "I rejoice", writes Theodore Stoudites to his pupil Anatolios and Anatolios' companion Sabbatios, "every time I receive a letter from you, my beloved darling children, because I hear your voice and am delighted, I bring your features to mind and brighten up".[38]

A letter is often likened to a nightingale or swallow bringing a message of joy, as in this passage by John Mauropous:

> Nay, I saw the season not as spring but as autumn, already advanced. Whence comes then, now, this nightingale of spring? It calls not from some grove, nor from a far-off wood, but … it flew into my very hands from whence now it sings in the mood of spring-time, casting from nigh a spell over my ears with the sweetness of music. Moreover, this most excellent bird appears to be – if I may become a little exquisite – in voice a nightingale but in form a swallow. This is so, because on the one hand it sings clearly and sweetly and on the other it marvellously blends in its appearance two contrasting colours: for the black colour of letters is enhanced by the whiteness of paper, just as the embroideries of an expensive purple are best set off against a bright and translucent cloth. Whether it is a nightingale or a swallow, this magnificent letter has filled my soul with every delight, persuading me to consider the season as a true second spring.[39]

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use in the collection of Maximos Planoudes' letters see Taxides, *Μάξιμος Πλανούδης*, pp. 243–59.

37 Theodoros Stoudites, *Letters*, no. 6, ed. Fatouros, vol. 1, p. 21, l. 1–3: Εἰ οἷόν τε ἦν δάκρυα ἐν γράμμασιν ἀποκομίζειν, ἐμπλήσας ταύτην μου ἂν τὴν ἐπιστολήν, τιμία καὶ γλυκεῖα καὶ θεοπόθητέ μου μῆτερ, παρεπεμψάμην σοι ἐν ταύταις ταῖς ἡμέραις.

38 Theodoros Stoudites, *Letters*, no. 164, ed. Fatouros, vol. 2, p. 285, l. 1–3: Χαίρω, ὁσάκις δέξωμαι ὑμῶν γράμμα, τέκνα μου ἀγαπητὰ καὶ ἐπιπόθητα· ἀκούω γὰρ ὑμῶν τῆς φωνῆς καὶ ἥδομαι, βλέπω κατὰ νοῦν ὑμῶν τὸν χαρακτῆρα καὶ γάννυμαι.

39 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 1, ed. Karpozilos, p. 43, l. 1–14 (trans. ibid., p. 42): Ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν ὥραν οὐ μὲν οὖν ὡς ἔαρ ἑώρων, ἀλλ' ὡς ἤδη μετόπωρον· πόθεν οὖν νυνὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἐαρινὴ ἀηδών; οὐκ ἀπ' ἄλσους ποθὲν οὐδ' ἐκ δρυμοῦ φωνοῦσα μακρόθεν, ἀλλ' ἐν τούτῳ τὸ πλέον ἔχει τοῦ θαύματος, ὅτι πρὸς αὐτὰς πετασθεῖσα τὰς χεῖρας τὰς ἡμετέρας κἀκεῖθεν ἡμῖν ἐαρινὰ κελαδοῦσα τῷ τῆς μουσικῆς ἡδυφώνῳ τὰς ἀκοὰς ἐγγύθεν κατακηλεῖ. δοκεῖ δ' ἡ πάντα βελτίστη, ἵνα τι μικρὸν καὶ παρακομψεύσωμαι, τὴν μὲν φωνὴν ἀηδών, τὴν δὲ μορφὴν χελιδών· τὸ μέν, ὅτι ᾄδει λιγυρόν τι καὶ μελιχρόν, τὸ δέ, ὅτι κέκραται θαυμαστῶς πως τὴν ὄψιν ἐξ ἐναντίων δύο χρωμάτων· τῇ γὰρ τοῦ χάρτου λευκότητι τὸ τῶν γραμμάτων μέλαν ἐμπρέπει, καθάπερ ὑφάσματι λαμπρῷ

In other cases, however, a letter is described as the "dew of Hermon", a phrase the Byzantine epistolographers borrowed from Psalm 133, which evokes the pleasure of being together in company, to express their joy and contentment at receiving the letter. The phrase is used by John Mauropous, who writes:

> May the oil of exultation anoint you, my Lord, in the same way that your divine letter enriched these dry bones of my own worthlessness; for it appeared to me sweeter and even more well-timed than the dew of Hermon in the Psalm which falls on the mountains of Zion.[40]

Other epistolographers quoting the same biblical phrase include Michael Choniates[41] and Constantine Akropolites, who writes in the opening of Letter 85:

> Like the dew of Hermon your holiness descended into my soul, which is parched by the flame of sorrow, divine master, for I received your letter and took such consolation that I became another man, and from a state of mourning and sadness have now recovered my cheerful disposition.[42]

The importance of rhetoric in the composition of letters is also evident in their structure. In most cases letters follow the structure of a normal rhetorical text, with introduction, body and conclusion. The Byzantines knew the importance of the introduction, which prepares the reader for the text that follows, and also its literary value. In some cases, indeed, either only the introduction survives or it accounts for almost the entire text, with the body of the letter expressed in a single sentence, as is the case with a letter from Michael Psellos to

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καὶ διαφανεῖ πολυτελοῦς πορφύρας ποικίλματα. εἴτε οὖν ἀηδὼν εἴτε χελιδὼν ἡ θεσπεσία γραφή, ἡδονῆς πάσης ἔπλησεν ἡμῖν τὴν ψυχήν, καὶ τὸν καιρὸν ἡμᾶς ἔπεισε δεύτερον ὄντως ἔαρ νομίσαι.

40 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 66, ed. Karpozilos, p. 177, l. 2–7 (trans. ibid., p. 176): οὕτω καὶ τὸν ἅγιόν μου δεσπότην λιπάνοι τὸ τῆς ἀγαλλιάσεως ἔλαιον, ὅπερ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἔχρισε παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους αὐτοῦ, ὡς ἡ θεία γραφή σου τὰ ξηρὰ ὀστᾶ ταῦτα τῆς ἐμῆς ἐλίπανεν οὐθενείας ἡδυτέρα φανεῖσά μου καὶ σφόδρα κατὰ καιρὸν ὑπὲρ τὴν ψαλμικὴν ἐκείνην δρόσον τὴν Ἀερμὼν τὴν ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη Σιὼν καταβαίνουσαν.

41 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 84, ed. Kolovou, p. 112, l. 1: ὡς δρόσος ἐπ᾽ ἄγρωστιν ἢ οἰκειότερον εἰπεῖν, ὡς δρόσος Ἀερμὼν; and *Letters*, no. 90, ibid., p. 117, l. 1–5: ὡς ὕδωρ ψυχρὸν … καὶ ἄλλη δρόσος Ἀερμὼν ὑμνουμένη παρὰ τῷ θείῳ Δαυίδ. See also Kolovou, *Μιχαὴλ Χωνιάτης*, pp. 212–13.

42 Constantine Akropolites, *Letters*, no. 85, ed. Romano, p. 173, l. 1–5: 'Δρόσος' ἄντικρυς 'Ἀερμὼν' λύπης μοι καταπιμπραμένῳ φλογὶ πρὸς τὸ τῆς σῆς ἁγιότητος ἐνεστάλαξε, θεσπέσιε δέσποτα. Τὸ γὰρ γράμμα ταύτης δεξάμενος καὶ παραμυθίας ἔνθεν παντοίας τυχὼν ἄλλος ἐξ ἄλλου γεγένημαι ὁ τέως ὀδυνῶν καὶ λύπης ἀνάπλεως εἰς εὐθυμίαν ἐπανελθών.

his nephew John Xiphilinos in which, after wondering why he has written such a long introduction, he merely asks his nephew to reply.[43]

The introduction often included a scriptural phrase or classical quotation pertinent to the subject to be discussed, or a comparison involving the importance and the role of the letter or the importance of friendship or lauding the person addressed and the letter he wrote. Another common feature is an expression of the writer's sorrow at being deprived of his correspondent's physical presence and having to converse with him by letter, or his grief at the other's absence or prolonged silence. This, for example, is how Theodore of Cyzicus begins his Letter A26, saying that he is forced into epistolary exchange with those with whom he ought to be enjoying face-to-face conversation and delighting in their company.[44]

Nikephoros Choumnos opens his Letter 64 to the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki in a similar fashion, expressing his unfulfilled desire to be always with him and enjoy live conversation with him. But, he goes on to say, since this is not possible and their inseparable souls are separated by distance, he has recourse to the second possibility open to him and consoles himself with the letters he receives from his hand and finds in them, as in an icon, his God-inspired conduct, and receives his blessing and benediction.[45] One interesting detail is his use of the phrase "as in an icon" (ὡς ἐν εἰκόνι), a direct reference to the role of the letter as icon.[46] The theme of the sorrow caused by a friend's absence is sometimes the subject of brief letters, such as Letter 168 of Constantine Akropolites.[47]

The body of the letter often contains, apart from the treatment of the matter that was the reason for its writing, passages on how the writer read his correspondent's previous letter or asking for his comments on his own,[48] and his

43 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 195, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 509, l. 9–11.

44 Theodore of Cyzicus, *Letters*, no. A26, ed. Tziatzi-Papagianni, p. 41, l. 1–3: Ὧν ἔμελλον τῆς κατ᾽ ὄψιν ὁμιλίας καὶ ξυναυλίας ἀμέσως μετὰ τῆς ἐν ἡδονῇ συνουσίας ἀπολαύειν, τούτοις, οὐκ οἶδ᾽ ὅπως εἴπω, διὰ μεσολαβούσης προσρήσεως νῦν συνέρχομαι.

45 Nikephoros Choumnos, *Letters*, no. 64, ed. Boissonade, pp. 74–75: ἠβουλόμην μὲν αὐτὸς διὰ παντὸς συνεῖναι καὶ τῆς αὐτοπροσώπου καταπολαύειν ποθεινῆς ὁμιλίας, ἅμα δὲ καὶ συχνὰ τὰς ἱερὰς περιπτύσσεσθαι χεῖρας καὶ θείας εὐλογίας ἐπιτυγχάνειν· ἐπεὶ δὲ μὴ ἔχω τοῦτο, καὶ τὴν ἀδιαστάτως ἔχουσαν ψυχὴν σωματικὴ διάστασις κρατεῖ … δεύτερον τοῖς σωματικοῖς ἡμῖν λείπτεται πρὸς παραμυθίαν γράμματα παρὰ τῆς σῆς θείας δέχεσθαι χειρὸς, καὶ τούτοις, ὡς ἐν εἰκόνι τῶν σῶν ἐνθεωτάτων ἠθῶν, συνεῖναι, καὶ ἅμα μὲν εὐχῶν καὶ εὐλογίας.

46 See above, p. 185 at n. 35.

47 Constantine Akropolites, *Letters*, no. 168, ed. Romano, p. 240, l. 1–4: Ὁ φίλος ἀποδημεῖ, ὁ φιλῶν ἀδημονεῖ. Τίς οὖν ὁ παρακαλέσων, τίς ὁ τῆς ἀκηδίας ἀπαλλάξων, εἰ μὴ ὁ ἀξιόχρεως σὺ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἀκέστωρ παθῶν καὶ ἐκ μακροῦ τούτων θεραπευτής ἐπιστῇς;

48 See, e.g., Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, no. 40, ed. Eustratiades, pp. 48–49.

admiration upon reading other letters.[49] Here, too, there may be quotations from ancient Greek literature as the writer constantly strives to show off his knowledge and skill.

Nor is the conclusion, where it can be distinguished from the body of the letter, immune to the influence of rhetoric. Often the writer does not confine himself to a standard salutation, but asks his correspondent to pray for him or not to forget him.[50] Fairly typical is the formulation used by Gregory of Cyprus in a letter to Theodora Raoulaina, which really has no specific subject but expresses a need to communicate and externalize his feelings: "Whenever some pretext for writing to you comes into my mind, I am accustomed to open and close my letter with prayers to God for you".[51]

The writers of these letters systematically avoid addressing their correspondent by name, preferring some other form of address, often related to his capacity (τίμιε δέσποτα, θεσπέσιε δέσποτα, ἀνδρῶν σοφώτατε, ποθεινότατε ἀδελφέ καὶ φίλε ἐρασμιώτατε), or indulging in wordplay based on the person's name, as for example Constantine Akropolites does in a letter to Kallistos asking for a manuscript in which he was interested, which he closes with the words "I have need of this book, to read it, and I have heard that you, who are the best (*kalliston*) in regard to all in accordance with your name, have acquired this most excellent (*kallisten*) book".[52]

One basic element of the rhetoric characteristic of Byzantine epistolography is the use of rhetorical expressions copied from other writers, a device permitted or recommended by the theoreticians. The use of quotation is, moreover, extremely common in all of Byzantine literature, and although it was earlier thought to be a slavish mimesis of older writers it is now seen as a witty literary game between scholars.

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49 See, e.g., Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, nos. 80, 117, 118, ed. Eustratiades, pp. 61–62, 94–96; id., *Letters*, nos. 7 (= no. 206 in Lameere, *La tradition manuscrite*) and 14 (= no. 213 in Lameere, *La tradition manuscrite*), ed. Kotzabassi, pp. 151, 155.

50 For a detailed examination of the structure of the letters of Maximos Planoudes, see Taxidis, *Μάξιμος Πλανούδης*, pp. 287–303.

51 Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, no. 6 (= no. 205 in Lameere, *La tradition manuscrite*), ed. Kotzabassi, p. 150, l. 1–2: Ἐμοὶ ὁπηνίκα τις ἐπέλθῃ πρόφασις γράφειν πρὸς σέ, εἴθισται προοίμιον ὡσανεὶ καὶ ἐπίλογον τῆς γραφῆς, τὰς ὑπὲρ σοῦ πρὸς θεὸν ποιεῖσθαι εὐχάς.

52 Constantine Akropolites, *Letters*, no. 25, ed. Romano, p. 127, l. 5–8: τῆς δὲ βίβλου πρὸς ἀνέλιξιν χρεία· ἤκουσται καὶ γάρ μοι καλλίστην ταύτην κεκτῆσθαί σε, τὸν τὰ πάντα φερωνύμως καὶ ἐφ᾽ ἅπασι κάλλιστον. For forms of address in Byzantine epistolography from the sixth to the twelfth century, see the fundamental study by Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede*; for a case study on the letters of Maximos Planoudes, see Taxides, *Μάξιμος Πλανούδης*, pp. 297–303.

As has been argued, rhetoric is an expression of the Byzantine mind and its *Weltanschauung*,[53] and the ways in which it is expressed in their letters constitute an expression of the writer's spiritual and philosophical frame of mind and intentions and a means of expressing his world view. Sometimes, however, they help make the real content of a letter truly comprehensible only to those who know the writer, and not to everyone. That is why we sometimes fail to understand what exactly is meant in a letter, when we are not familiar with the facts or persons alluded to, which, wanting his letter to be timeless rather than topical, the writer has cleverly concealed. On the other hand, the use of metaphors, similes and images to describe and identify the nature of a letter, the character of the addressee and the persons mentioned in it reflect, as Kolovou showed for the letters of Michael Choniates, not only his world view but also his attitude towards things and his perception of expressions of truth.[54]

The use of quotations from ancient authors reflects, as is natural, both each writer's knowledge and the trend of the age. Quotations from the classics combine harmoniously with passages from the Bible, mythology with proverbs.[55] Quotations from classical authors are a basic element of mimesis (*imitatio*), which is an expression of the Atticism to which the Byzantine epistolographers were devoted. Indeed, the selection and use of older epistolographers as models for later generations already points the way to mimesis. For them, mimesis is not slavish adherence to an original but creative elaboration, and is closely allied to rhetoric.[56]

Sometimes, of course, mimesis goes beyond the usual bounds, and certain epistolographers borrow whole letters from earlier practitioners of the art and rework them to a greater or a lesser degree. Characteristic examples of this

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53 Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, p. 1: "Rhetoric did not simply provide the machinery of literary endeavor; it was a key element of the Byzantine *Weltanschauung*. It gave formal structure through the logos to the fundamental characteristics and innermost aspirations of the Byzantine Christian Mind." For rhetoric as an expression of the Byzantine mind, see also Beck, "Ἡ ῥητορικὴ τῶν Βυζαντινῶν".

54 Kolovou, *Μιχαὴλ Χωνιάτης*, pp. 201–02.

55 Still important for the imitation of antiquity in Byzantine literature is Hunger, "On the Imitation (Mimesis) of Antiquity". For the use of quotations in Byzantine letters see generally Littlewood, "A Statistical Survey".

56 Stratis Papaioannou makes an interesting observation on John Sikeliotes' description of rhetoric as mimetic (*Commentary on Hermogenes'* On Forms, ed. Walz, p. 103, l. 24–25: μιμητικὴ γὰρ οὖσα ἡ ῥητορικὴ προσώπων καὶ πραγμάτων; p. 248, l. 3–7: μιμητικὴ τέχνη ἡ ῥητορική); see Papaioannou, "Michael Psellos", p. 81, n. 21. Mimesis was linked to rhetoric as early as the days of Choricius of Gaza; see his *Defense of the Mimes* 2.13, eds. Foerster/Richsteig, p. 347, l. 14–15: ὁρᾶτε τοίνυν, ὅσαι τέχναι τὸ πλῆθος ἔργον ποιοῦνται τὴν μίμησιν, ῥητορική, ποίησις ...

practice are furnished by Leo of Synada, whose collected letters include one from Basil of Caesarea to a notary, which he addressed to notaries of his day without changing anything in the original text, not even altering the salutation from the singular to the plural number which his use of it required, and John Mauropous, who used a letter of Gregory of Nazianzos in a similar way.[57]

The Byzantine epistolographers have their own way of referencing earlier writers: by mimesis, rather than direct quotation. They frequently omit the name of the writer alluded to, or else merely hint at it, so as to give their correspondent a chance to discover it for himself. Nor do they hesitate to adapt the passage to the context of their letter, sometimes altering it to a degree that makes it very difficult, despite the tools available, for the modern editor to identify what lies hidden beneath the text of the Byzantine letter. As has already been observed, the deviations from the original text cited by the Byzantine writer are not due solely to the fact that he was quoting from memory, because he did not have to hand the manuscripts of older writers or because it is difficult to search them for the passage required on each occasion, but because these are conscious and deliberate modifications made for reasons of style and variation (*variatio*).[58] Unfortunately, we are not in a position to have a more general overview of the texts used by the Byzantine epistolographers and the frequency of use of quotation, because many editors, even now, do not search systematically for allusions, which makes them difficult to identify.[59] The figures in the case of Kolovou's edition of the letters of Eustathios of Thessaloniki are truly striking, and the number of allusions and quotations she identifies extremely large: some 400 in roughly 2750 lines of text.[60] Of course, not all Byzantine epistolographers were equally familiar with the classics, but it seems safe to say that there is no Byzantine letter of the middle and late period without at least one such quotation.

Eustathios of Thessaloniki endeavors, as Kolovou observes, to rid the letter of the typical features of ancient epistolary theory and address it from the

57 On this subject see Grünbart, "Beobachtungen zur byzantinischen Briefrhetorik", who includes a number of other examples of letter borrowing in Byzantine collections.

58 See Reinsch, "Die Zitate in der Alexias Anna Komnenes" and the introduction to Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, ed. Kolovou, p. 29*.

59 With the exception of Kolovou's systematic studies of the use of allusion in the letters of Michael Choniates and Eustathios of Thessaloniki (see Kolovou, *Μιχαήλ Χωνιάτης*, pp. 201–08; Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, ed. Kolovou, pp. 25*–75*; Kolovou, "Auf der Suche nach einer Theorie des Zitats") and Taxides' recent contribution on the letters of Maximos Planoudes (Taxides, *Μάξιμος Πλανούδης*, pp. 261–85), for the other epistolographers we must be content with the apparatus fontium in the critical editions (where these exist).

60 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, ed. Kolovou, p. 29*.

aesthetic point of view as an open literary genre. This approach leads him to write letters in which the dominant characteristics belong to other genres, e.g. encomium (Letter 19), ekphrasis (Letters 1, 3, 4, 5), parody (Letter 6), or combine the features of various literary genres.[61]

Letters displaying features of other literary genres are found in other Byzantine collections as well. Nikephoros Gregoras wrote an encomium to his birthplace Heraclea, in Pontus, in the form of a letter,[62] while the letter of Theodore Metochites to the monks of the Chora is also a monody for its abbot, Luke.[63]

In the collections of Byzantine letters there are also some that may be classed as *ethopoiiai*, as for example Letters 48 and 50 of Gregory of Cyprus, entitled respectively "By himself to himself as if written by another" (τοῦ αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ὡς ἀπ᾽ ἄλλου and τοῦ αὐτοῦ ὡς πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ὡς ὑφ᾽ ἑτέρου),[64] and possibly Letter 111, which in some manuscripts is headed "by himself to himself as if written by the physician Theognostos" (τοῦ αὐτοῦ ὡς ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεογνώστου ἰητροῦ πρὸς ἑαυτόν).[65] Similar to these is Letter 36 of Nikephoros Choumnos, styled "As if from Xanthopoulos to the head of the orphanage",[66] and Letter 95, which purports to be written by one friend to help another (ἐποιήθη τινὶ τῶν ἑταίρων κατὰ χρείαν πρὸς ἕτερον).[67] One related but distinct category comprises of what are described as fictional letters, letters between characters from the past, such as those of Theophylact Simokattes.[68]

The clear instructions of the scholars and theoreticians of the genre in the early centuries notwithstanding, and although the Byzantines never forgot that a letter is a substitute for interpersonal communication, many of these principles gradually came to be flouted, increasing the proportion of rhetoric in epistolography. Many letters do not display the recommended simplicity, or a rational use of quotation and figures of speech. Not only did some of the Byzantine epistolographers not follow the advice urging simplicity of style and

61 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, nos. 1, 3–6, 19, ed. Kolovou, pp. 3–5, 7–25, 60–71 with the introduction at p. 23*.

62 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, nos. 20–21, ed. Leone, vol. 2, pp. 62–71.

63 Theodore Metochites, *Letter to the Monks of the Chora*, ed. and trans. Ševcenko.

64 Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, nos. 48, 50, ed. Eustratiades, pp. 34–36.

65 Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, no. 111, ed. Eustratiades, p. 86.

66 Nikephoros Choumnos, *Letters*, no. 36, ed. Boissonade, pp. 43–44.

67 Nikephoros Choumnos, *Letters*, no. 95, ed. Boissonade, pp. 131–34.

68 Theophylact Simokattes, *Letters*, ed. Zanetto. This category might also include the letters of real epistolographers addressed to personages from the past, such as that of John Chortasmenos to Libanios. For the fictional letters see Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 205–06 and the discussion of the use of the term in Riehle, "Epistolography as Autobiography", p. 2, esp. n. 4.

the use of mythological and other references, but they also adopted exaggerated devices.

The same is true of the advice concerning brevity or tailoring the length of the letter to the requirements of the subject, as Gregory of Nazianzos recommended in his letter to Nikoboulos.[69] Letters are too often unjustifiably long, or the writer may, as in the case of Constantine Akropolites, comment that just as when his correspondent is present he cannot get enough of talking to him, so when he is writing him a letter he cannot restrain his greediness.[70]

This does not of course mean that among the many extant Byzantine letters there are few that are short. The principle of brevity was frequently invoked by Byzantine letter-writers for various reasons, to justify their short length or the abrupt ending of their letters, describing their terseness of expression and such letters themselves as *laconic*,[71] in reference to the Spartans' reputation for using a minimum of words. One of the earliest preachers of this principle was Libanios, who repeatedly lauded the ability to say much in few words, while his collected letters include several laconic ones.[72] To avoid misunderstandings with the meaning of the word λακωνίζειν, however, Gregory of Nazianzos informs his nephew Nikoboulos in a "laconic" letter that "to be laconic is not what you think it is, writing few syllables, rather it is writing little while saying much".[73] He goes on to compare Homer and Antimachus, declaring that he judges by content and not by number of words who writes concisely and who does not. Gregory of Cyprus, perhaps imitating Gregory of Nazianzos, attempts something similar, relating brevity of expression to fullness of meaning and recommending the reader (πρός τινας τῶν ὁμιλητῶν) to prefer concision in the composition of letters, which is acceptable as long as the writer succeeds in formulating complete meanings concisely, and the meaning is expressed shortly and stylishly.[74] Laconic letters are also found in several Byzantine collections, such as those of Synsesios of Cyrene, Patriarch Photios,

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69 See above, p. 178 at n. 4.

70 Constantine Akropolites, *Letters*, no. 103, ed. Romano, pp. 198–99, l. 1–6: Ὥσπερ οἶμαι τῆς σῆς ὁμιλίας κόρος οὐκ ἔσται τῷ ταύτῃ συγγινομένῳ, κἂν εἰς ὅτι πλεῖστον ἐκτείνοιτο, οὕτω δὴ καὶ τῆς διὰ γραμμάτων προσρήσεως ἀπλήστως ὁ ταύτης ἕξει τυχών· ἀλλὰ τοῦ προτέρου τυχὼν ἔγωγε πρότερον καὶ ἀποτυχὼν ἐκδημήσαντος τὸ δεύτερον. Δευτέρως ὡς τὸ πρῶτον ἡγησάμην δεξάμενος, μόνον γὰρ οὐχ ὁμιλεῖν ἔδοξα τῷ προσαγορεύσαντι.

71 Laconic letters are those of three to six lines in length; see Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, p. 220.

72 Libanios, *Letters*, nos. 3, 7, 418, 494, 594, 609, 611–614, 687, 706, 849, 893, 1077, 1078, 1136, 1143, 1290, 1348, ed. Foerster.

73 Gregory of Nazianzos, *Letters*, no. 54, ed. and trans. Gallay, vol. 1, p. 70: Τὸ λακωνίζειν οὐ τοῦτό ἐστιν, ὅπερ οἴει, ὀλίγας συλλαβὰς γράφειν, ἀλλὰ περὶ πλείστων ὀλίγας.

74 Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, no. 222 in Lameere, *La tradition manuscrite* (unedited).

John Mauropous, Patriarch Gregory of Cyprus, Nikephoros Choumnos,[75] Constantine Akropolites,[76] and Nikephoros Gregoras.[77]

While very few laconic letters may be found in the collected letters of Maximos Planoudes, the Byzantine scholar was nonetheless well aware of the principle of brevity prescribed by the early theoreticians of the genre. Thus, in an exceptionally long letter to the *logothetes ton agelon* Phakrases he reminds his correspondent that if his letter had concerned only his brother it would have been easier to be brief.[78] Elsewhere, he refuses to write briefly, saying that he never tried to be laconic and that if that was how things were (that he ought to be brief) he preferred to imitate Pythagoras and be silent, because brevity is a trait of those who love little while silence is that of those who love not at all, and he himself had never learned to love little, but either much or not at all.[79] He returns to the subject of brevity at the end of the first part of a long letter to Melchisedek Akropolites, saying that up to that point his letter is as terse and concise as if written by a Spartan, but since his correspondent prefers the Attic to the Laconic he will add some more about his nephew's death.[80] We also find something similar in another letter to Melchisedek, in which he replies to certain comments, apparently from his correspondent, about the length of a previous letter.[81]

Nikephoros Choumnos sends his discourse *On the air* and a collection of letters written over the previous two days at the request of a friend with a letter

75 See in this regard Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 219–20: Synesios, *Letters*, nos. 33, 36, 39, 45, 63–65, 77, 92, ed. Garzya; Photios, *Letters*, nos. 49, 52, 53, 55–59, 86–88, 90, 91, 138–140, 143, 166, 195, 207, 224, 234, 237, 253, 256, 257, eds. Laourdas/Westerink; John Mauropus, *Letters*, nos. 12–16, ed. and trans. Karpozilos; Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, nos. 18, 19, 31, 92, 95, ed. Eustratiades; Nikephoros Choumnos, *Letters*, nos. 28, 46–55, 96, 98–100, 109–120, 152, ed. Boissonade.

76 Constantine Akropolites, *Letters*, nos. 1–4, 8–11, 38, 43–44, 119–120, 124, 126–127, 131–133, 136, 141–142, 145–146, 150, 152, 154, 156, 157, 163, 166, 168–169, 186, 194, ed. Romano.

77 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, nos. 31, 35, 48, 51, 64, 66, 75, ed. Leone.

78 Maximos Planoudes, *Letters*, no. 12, ed. Leone, p. 32, l. 21–23: ἐγὼ δ' εἰ μὲν διὰ τὸν ἀδελφὸν μόνον ἐπιστέλλειν ἠξίουν, ῥᾷστον ἦν ἐπιστολῇ Λακωνικῇ πρὸς σὲ χρησάμενον οὕτω γράφειν.

79 Maximos Planoudes, *Letters*, no. 117, ed. Leone, p. 193, l. 21–28: Τοῦ βραχύτερα ἐπιστεῖλαί με πόρρω τῶν ὑμετέρων ὄντος ἐλπίδων αἰτίαν γράφεις τὴν τῆς ἡμετέρας γνώμης μετάστασιν· οὗ φῂς ἕνεκεν καὶ λακωνίσαι μᾶλλον ἑλέσθαι, ἢ κατὰ τὰ πρότερον εἰθισμένα με γράψαι. ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν οὕτω ταῦτ' ἦν, Λάκων μὲν οὐκ ἄν ποτ' ἐπειράθην ἐγὼ γενέσθαι, Πυθαγόραν δ' ἂν μᾶλλον ἐμιμησάμην σιγήσας. ἐκεῖνο μὲν γὰρ τῶν βραχέα φιλούντων, τοῦτο δὲ τῶν οὐδόλως. ἐγὼ μέντοι μικρὰ φιλεῖν οὔκουν ἔμαθον, ἀλλ' ἤτοι γε σφόδρα ἢ οὐδαμῶς.

80 Maximos Planoudes, *Letters*, no. 94, ed. Leone, p. 144, l. 6–10: Μέχρι μὲν τούτων ἀνὴρ ἂν Λάκων ἐπέστειλε καί τισιν ἴσως οὐ φαυλότερα τῶν μακρῶν ἔδοξε λόγων· ἐπεὶ δ' αὐτὸς ἀττικίζειν με βούλει μᾶλλον ἢ λακωνίζειν, προσθήσω καὶ ταῦτα σὴν χάριν, ἃ φιλοσοφοῦντί σοι περὶ τὴν τελευτὴν τοῦ ἀδελφιδοῦ, τοῦ χρυσοῦ παιδὸς ἐκείνου, συμφιλοσοφήσει.

81 Maximos Planoudes, *Letters*, no. 89, ed. Leone, p. 136, l. 10–16.

to his son John in which he explains the circumstances in which those letters were written. They are extemporaneous, he says, written in the space of just two days (yesterday and the day before) and all on the same subject, not because there was some necessity nor out of ambition to show how easily, rapidly and adroitly he could compose letters, but because one of his best friends had asked him to, as a test of his linguistic abilities. And thus, he says, some tend towards the Laconic and others towards the Attic, but without conflicting, while in closing he urges his son to do better than he has and write better letters.[82]

Long or short, the Byzantine letters are without doubt products of the art of rhetoric so highly appreciated by the Byzantine world. This does not mean, of course, that they are cold, tedious exercises, of no interest to the modern reader or use to the scholar, for a considerable number of Byzantine epistolographers were sufficiently talented to go beyond the conventions of rhetoric and create superb literary works of art.

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82 Nikephoros Choumnos, *Letters*, no. 4, ed. Boissonade, p. 5, l. 1–9: Ἔχεις ἰδού, μετὰ τοῦ περὶ ἀέρος λόγου, καὶ τὰς ἐπιστολὰς αἷς μήπω συνεγένου, αὐτοσχεδίους τοῦτόν τε καὶ ταύτας, χθὲς καὶ πρότριτα συχνὰς ἄλλας ἐπ᾽ ἄλλαις ἐπὶ ταῖς αὐταῖς ὑποθέσεσιν ἐξειργασμένας, οὐ κατὰ χρείαν μᾶλλον (εἰρήσεται γὰρ τἀληθές) ἢ φιλοτιμίαν εὐκολίας περὶ τὸ λέγειν καὶ γοῦν ὀξύτητος καὶ τραχυτῆτος, φίλου τινὸς τῶν ἀρίστων ἐπιτάττοντος καὶ δοκιμάζοντος καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς γλώττης, ἀποπειρωμένου. Καὶ ἔχεις τὰς μὲν λακωνιζούσας, τὰς δ᾽ ἀττικιζούσας, μὴ μέντοι μαχομένας πρὸς ἀλλήλας. Choumnos refers here to his "laconic" (*Letters*, no. 46–55, ed. Boissonade) and "attic" letters (*Letters*, no. 56–59, ed. Boissonade).

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CHAPTER 7

Epistolography and Diplomatics

Alexander Beihammer

1 Letters and Charters

Finding a clear distinction and defining the exact relationship between letters and charters is not as easy as it may appear at first sight. Certainly, modern definitions based on formal and content-related criteria teach us that "charters" are written statements bearing testimony to all sorts of legal matters and are composed in accordance with certain rules determining their formulaic patterns and outward appearance. "Letters", instead, merely convey messages and do not include declarations of intent entailing legal effects.[1] The problem is that modern terms and classifications hardly correspond to medieval views and, what is more, the boundaries between the two categories, which, for the sake of clarity, modern scholars are so eager to distinguish, are mostly blurred and subject to long-term developments in the chancery practices of medieval issuing authorities. To begin with, many types of official documents are called and conceived of as *litterae* or *epistolae*. The Roman legal practice, most probably in the third century, introduced a new kind of dispositive charter, which, in contrast to written testimonies describing legal matters from the recipient's viewpoint, was issued by the recipient's contract partner in the form of letters, i.e., *epistolae*.[2] Hence, from early on, the use of documents completing legal transactions was closely intertwined with practices of letter writing, and there was a strong reciprocal influence between the elements and formulaic patterns of the two spheres. In the Middle Ages, despite plenty of changes and breaks with the Roman legal tradition, most political entities, at least in the early period, retain the basic distinction between written testimonies and dispositive charters, i.e., *notitia* vs. *carta*, continuing to label the latter alternatively as *epistolae*. As a result, most imperial, royal, seigneurial, and papal charters, which are classified as dispositive *cartae* irrespective of their permanent or temporary character as diplomas and mandates, bear certain characteristics of letters, such as an address directed at specific recipients or a general audience

1 Bresslau, *Handbuch*, pp. 1, 48.
2 Ibid., pp. 45–46.

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(*inscriptio, promulgatio*) or salutation formulas.[3] In the German Empire of the fourteenth century, we come across a distinct form of imperial letters or mandates, the so-called *litterae clausae*, which were closed by a wax seal securing the secrecy of their contents. As regards the papal chancery, which in many respects was influenced by Roman imperial documents and administrative acts of state officials, from about the mid-eleventh century onwards, there can be observed a distinction between solemn privilege charters and simple *litterae*, which in the second half of the twelfth century were further subdivided into two categories of letters on matters of grace (*litterae de gratia* or *cum filo serico*) and judicial letters (*litterae de iustitia* or *cum filo canapis*).[4] This brief outline of western chancery practices should make it sufficiently clear that Roman traditions bequeathed to the empire's successor states and institutions the practice of putting legal transactions and administrative measures into writing by having recourse to the communication medium of letters. It goes without saying that this also applies to the Byzantine East, where continuities with the Roman past in many respect were much more immediate and unbroken than elsewhere.

A basic obstacle faced by all attempts to reconstruct Byzantine chancery practices on almost all levels is the paucity of surviving original documents and reliable copies. The great monastic centers of Mount Athos and the monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Patmos are the only institutions to preserve Byzantine archival sources in a considerable number. In addition, we dispose of a number of cartularies and isolated charters from other monasteries and ecclesiastical institutions, but one has to bear in mind that the bulk of this material consists of specific types of charters mostly related to landed properties and economic activities. Most regrettably, except for two manuscripts pertaining to the patriarchate of Constantinople in the fourteenth century and a small number of chancery handbooks, all archives and registers of Byzantine issuing authorities, both secular and ecclesiastical, have been completely destroyed. Hence, several types of documents, such as imperial letters and treaties, are known to us only through a few original exemplars surviving in the archives of European recipients. Unavoidably, this poor state of transmission causes many uncertainties and gaps in our knowledge, especially with respect to the long period from the late antique Roman Empire up to the eleventh century, the time from which Byzantine official acts are available in greater number. Many basic issues – such as the diversification and typological evolution of imperial and patriarchal documents, the production of documents by

3 Ibid., pp. 47–49.

4 Ibid., pp. 65–74; Rabikauskas, *Diplomatica pontificia*, pp. 40–50.

state officials and ecclesiastical chanceries in metropolitan churches, bishoprics, and monasteries, the historical development of Byzantine notaries and notarial deeds putting into writing the legal transactions of private contractual partners – can hardly be investigated and elucidated on the basis of the surviving material.[5] This overall lack of evidence, certainly, makes it difficult to see how the Byzantines themselves diachronically perceived and explained the relationship between letters and charters. The fact is that within the broad spectrum reaching from pure legal documents to literary private letters one comes across a fairly large overlap area lying at the intersection between both types. As a result, in Byzantium, just as in the medieval west, there were patterns of mutual influence determining the formal and morphological particularities of chancery products and engendering a number of similarities between letters and charters. To begin with, there are several well-known letter collections of prominent emperors and patriarchs – Manuel II Palaiologos, Nicholas I Mystikos, Gregory of Cyprus, and Athanasios I, to mention only the most renowned ones – who considered the material collected therein primarily as products of their own literary creativity, worth being made known to their intellectual peers.[6] This, however, by no means excluded the possibility that some pieces incorporated in these collections were documents of the highest political significance and thus immediate expressions of a supreme authority's will. Nicholas I's correspondence, for instance, includes numerous documents concerning negotiations with the Abbasid caliphate, Symeon of Bulgaria, and the pope of Rome.[7] Many letters in Athanasios' collection are messages addressed to Emperor Andronikos II.[8] There is no doubt that this kind of letter could and should fulfill a twofold purpose, serving, on the one hand, as literary products representing the highest esthetic and rhetorical standards and, on the other, as official statements of political and ecclesiastical leaders. Just as in the overall social fabric of the empire's aristocracy and administrative elite, the legal and literary sphere, political reasoning and intellectual contemplation, were closely connected. Letters and charters were oscillating expressions of one and the same socio-political mechanism.

A further diversification resulted from the heritage of late antique legal and administrative structures and the requirements of a complicated state apparatus. In particular, one has to take into account the broad variety of secular and

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5 For details and further bibliographical references, see Beihammer, "Byzantinische Diplomatik", pp. 173–87.

6 For current editions and bibliographical references, see Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 235–36.

7 Nicholas I, *Letters*, eds. and trans. Jenkins/Westerink.

8 Athanasios I, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Talbot.

ecclesiastical officials and dignitaries inside and outside the empire, who were in more or less regular contact with each other and with the supreme leaders on the imperial or patriarchal throne of Constantinople. Emperors issued laws and decrees, gave orders to subordinate officials, granted titles and bestowed privileges upon their relatives and subjects, conducted negotiations and concluded treaties with foreign powers. Similar activities were performed by the patriarchs in the ecclesiastical sphere. It is only natural that all these functions engendered the development and constant adaptation of a broad spectrum of chancery products, which on various levels incorporated terms and formal elements of letters.

Let us have a look at the terminology used for documents issued by the imperial and the patriarchal chancery: In both institutions, besides a number of technical terms designating specific types of documents with respect to their purpose and content – such as νεαρά (law decree), χρυσόβουλλος λόγος (privilege charter), κέλευσις or πρόσταγμα (order), συνοδικὴ διάγνωσις (synodical decision), etc. – there were in use more generic terms related to the semantic field of "letter" and applicable to various types of documents. A word of crucial significance, which appears in both imperial and patriarchal documents, is πιττάκιον. Originally, it designated a piece of paper or parchment folded several times, and a simple letter in contrast to the rhetorically elaborated literary letters. The evidence of the fourteenth-century patriarchal chancery, however, shows that in the course of time the term came to designate private letters of the patriarch as distinguished from purely administrative documents called γράμμα or ἔνταλμα. In the imperial chancery, the word was more frequently used during the Komnenian period as an equivalent to the technical terms for imperial orders.[9] A well-known example is the so-called *kodikellos* for Christodoulos of Palermo, by which Emperor Alexios I in 1109 granted the latter the title of *protonobelissimos*. On the verso, the document defined itself as πιττάκιον ἀξιωματικόν.[10] Letters in the strict sense of the word, i.e., diplomatic letters addressed to foreign potentates, are frequently called (θεία) σάκρα or *sacra iussio* in the seventh and eighth century;[11] later on, they appear as γραφή or γράμμα ("letter") without further specification, and towards the end of the twelfth century as βασιλικόν ("imperial [letter]").[12] The patriarchal chancery seems to have been much less specific as to the types of documents, mostly

9 Darrouzès, "Ekthésis néa", pp. 85–92.

10 Dölger, "Kodikellos" (in id., *Byzantinische Diplomatik*), pp. 2–3, 5; Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten 1025–1204*, no. 1245a (April 1109).

11 Dölger/Müller, *Regesten 565–867*, nos. 242, 244, 255, 256.

12 Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten 1025–1204*, nos. 1320a, 1320b, 1582, 1606, 1610, 1612.

distinguishing between the simple γράμμα and the more solemn σιγιλλιῶδες γράμμα.[13] The reservation must be made, however, that the transmission of patriarchal documents is even scantier and more problematic than that of imperial ones. Only from the second half of the thirteenth century onwards do we dispose of a greater number of original charters, formularies, and, above all, the two surviving manuscripts Vind. hist. gr. 47 and 48 of the Austrian National Library from the so-called Register of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, all of which give us much clearer insights into the practices and working principles of the patriarchal chancery.[14] All in all, the terms used by Byzantine chanceries for various types of documents were far from unambiguous and could mean different things depending upon time and semantic context. Accordingly, despite some clarifying tendencies, there never was a clear terminological distinction between letters and official documents, as might be expected on the basis of the modern usage of these terms.

2 Imperial Diplomatic Letters

In what follows I will concentrate on imperial letters in the strict sense, i.e., diplomatic letters addressed to foreign rulers ("Auslandsschreiben"). It is important to note that apart from these official letters, which were usually delivered by Byzantine envoys during their visits at foreign courts, there were also other types of diplomatic letters, such as more informal messages to members of foreign dynasties or instructions to ambassadors and other go-betweens taking part in the negotiation procedures.[15] The available evidence for these secondary types of diplomatic letters is extremely scarce, but it sheds some light on the fact that the major part of the diplomatic business was a matter of personal interaction, confidential talks, and oral communication. The content of the official imperial letters conveys but a faint idea of what was at stake in the diplomatic contacts with foreign rulers.[16] They largely confined themselves to ideological statements, general principles of friendly relations and mutual understanding, flattering formulas of court etiquette, and courtesies.

13 Dölger, *Schatzkammern*, pp. 212–18.

14 For all these problems, see Pieralli, *I documenti originali*.

15 Malamut, "Lettre diplomatique", pp. 148–49.

16 Ibid., pp. 152–60 (referring to Andronikos II's letter to Pope John XXII from 1327 and Theodore Metochites' report about the 1299 negotiations with King Milutin of Serbia concerning the king's marriage with the emperor's daughter Simonis). For the tenth century, see, for instance, Beihammer, "Sturz des Bardas Skleros", pp. 21–47.

In the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the maritime republics and city-states in Italy increasingly professionalized and institutionalized their diplomatic relations among each other and with the outside world, and created a widely ramified network of communication over the Mediterranean.[17] It is hard to assess to what extent this development had an impact on the diplomatic practices and modes of communication at the Byzantine imperial court. The close personal ties Byzantine elites maintained with their Genoese and Venetian peers as well as the influx of Greek intellectuals and pro-Latin theologians into Italy certainly contributed to an intensification of contacts, interactions, and exchanges.[18] The presence of Italian notaries in Constantinople led to the adoption of Latin as the main language of communication with western recipients and certain elements of western notarial deeds in documents and letters issued by the imperial chancery.[19] Yet it is unclear whether the Byzantine imperial court during the last decades of its existence was able to adopt some of the structural sophistication of Italian diplomacy.

What is the material that has come down to us? What are the main problems that modern scholars confront? Original letters, like all other types of imperial documents, survive in a very small number. For the entire period from Late Antiquity up to the twelfth century, we have at our disposal only one papyrus fragment of an original imperial letter, which in the seventeenth century was discovered in the monastic archive of Saint Denis and is now preserved in the National Archive of Paris. Scholarly opinions disagree about the chronological and political context of this remarkable piece, which is, after all, the oldest original document emanating from the political correspondence of Byzantium with Western Europe. W. Ohnsorge's widely accepted attempt to date the letter to 6 May 843 has been recently questioned by M. McCormick, who argues for 827.[20] The next surviving original exemplars are three documents issued by Emperor John II in June 1139 and April 1141 and by his son and successor Manuel I in August 1146. The main reason for their preservation is that these letters were addressed to one of the most stable and long-lasting institutions of the Middle Ages, the Apostolic See, the incumbents of which at the time in

17 Lazzarini, "Écrire à l'autre", pp. 165–85.

18 Ibid., pp. 171–72.

19 Oikonomides, "Chancellerie imperiale", pp. 176–77.

20 Ohnsorge, "Kaiserbündnis", pp. 131–83; McCormick, "Lettre diplomatique", pp. 135–49; this opinion has also been adopted by Dölger/Müller, *Regesten 565–867*, no. 413 (May 827), unfortunately without discussing the pros and cons of this new interpretation or referring to the content and broader context of this letter.

question were Innocent II and Eugenius III.[21] These pieces stand out because of their extraordinary outward appearance. They are written in gold ink on a lavishly ornamented purple-colored parchment surface of about four meters in length. The text consists of a Greek version and an authentic Latin translation written below the concluding section of the Greek part. Five letters originating from the correspondence of the Angeloi Emperors Isaac II and Alexios III with Genoese authorities in the period 1188–1199 are preserved in the State Archive of Genoa.[22] Though chronologically quite close to the aforementioned pieces, these letters are issued in a very modest form without any claims to imperial splendor.

Unfortunately, the overall increase of archival material in Western Europe during the later Middle Ages did not entail a richer transmission of Byzantine imperial letters. Certainly, there is a greater variety as far as the recipients are concerned, but in numbers the material from the thirteenth and fourteenth century is even less than what has come down to us from the twelfth century. We have three letters to the popes John XXI and Nicholas III from 1277 and 1279, all of which are confessions of faith related to the Church Union of 1274, and only one letter to the *podestà* of Genoa despite the economic and political predominance of this power from the reign of Michael VIII onwards.[23] As regards the fourteenth century, we have four letters, one to King James II of Aragon (August 1317), two to King Charles IV of France (May 1327), and one to the Commune of Siena (22 September 1399).[24] From just the last fifty years of the empire's existence there survive a greater number of original documents, eight in total, which, in one way or another, are mostly related to Constantinople's need for help and financial support from various European powers and the relations with the Ottoman sultanate under Murād II.[25] Except for the letters

21 Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten 1025–1204*, nos. 1320a (June 1139), 1320b (April 1141), 1348 (August 1146); for a new edition and detailed description and analysis of the 1139 document, see Kresten/Müller, "Auslandsschreiben", pp. 422–29, with photos of the upper and the central part between the Greek and the Latin text.

22 Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten 1025–1204*, nos. 1582 (December 1188), 1606 (October 1191), 1610 (April 1192), 1612 (November 1192), 1649 (March 1199).

23 Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten 1204–1282*, nos. 2028 (April 1277, Pope John XXI), 2073 (April 1277, Andronikos II to Pope John XXI), 2041 (September 1279, Pope Nicolas III), 2117 (August 1286, podestà Enrico Petia); for the letters to the Apostolic See, see *Imperial Letters of the 13th Century*, nos. 20, 21, 26, ed. Pieralli, pp. 303–22, 323–48, 373–83.

24 Dölger, *Regesten 1282–1341*, nos. 2391, 2565, 2566; Dölger, *Regesten 1341–1453*, no. 3275; for the diplomatic correspondence during the reign of Andronikos II, see also Malamut, "Lettre diplomatique".

25 Dölger, *Regesten 1341–1453*, nos. 3282 (30 August 1400, King Charles III of Navarra), 3284 (15 June 1401, John I of Portugal), 3290 (20 June 1402, Pope Benedict XIII of Avignon), 3317

to the pope, which unsurprisingly are found in the Vatican Archive,[26] the letters of the Palaeologan period are preserved in numerous public and ecclesiastical archives dispersed throughout Italy (Archivio di Stato of Genoa, Siena, Mantua, and Modena);[27] Spain (Archivio de la Corona d'Aragón in Barcelona, Cathedral of Palma de Mallorca, Cathedral of Pamplona);[28] Portugal (sacristy of the monastery Batalha, now lost);[29] France (Archives Nationales de France, Paris);[30] and the Archive of the Topkapı Sarayı in Istanbul.[31] As a result, the years 1139–1146, 1188–1199, and 1400–1451 show the greatest density in the transmission of original diplomatic letters. In contrast to the Komnenian and Angeloi period with eight letters to two different recipients (the pope and Genoa), the fifteenth-century documents reflect a much broader geographic variety, illustrating the widely ramified network of contacts in that period. The outward appearance of these pieces, which are mostly written in Latin – only the letter to the Ottoman dignitary was issued in Greek – is very much in line with the mass production of fifteenth-century European chanceries; only the emperor's red signature reminds us of traditional Byzantine practices and its origin in the ancient imperial city.

3 Internal and External Characteristics

As regards the typology and diachronic development of the internal and external characteristics of Byzantine imperial letters, our knowledge still very much depends upon what Franz Dölger wrote on the subject in a number of articles and in his handbook on imperial documents published between the 1920s and the late 1960s.[32] It was his merit to have outlined the typological features, on the basis of which diplomatic letters addressed to foreign rulers ("Auslandsschreiben") can be distinguished from other types of imperial

(23 October 1407, King Martin I of Aragon), 3343 (28 November 1414, King Ferdinand I of Aragon), 3417 (3 May 1424, Doge Francesco Foscari of Venice), 3513 (April 1447, Sarūja Beg), 3533 (7 April 1451, Duke Borso d'Este of Modena).

26 Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten 1204–1282*, nos. 2006, 2028, 2041, 3126; an exception is no. 3290.

27 Dölger, *Regesten 1282–1341*, no. 2117; Dölger, *Regesten 1341–1453*, nos. 3275, 3417, 3533.

28 Dölger, *Regesten 1282–1341*, no. 2391; Dölger, *Regesten 1341–1453*, nos. 3282, 3290, 3317, 3343; for the latter two, see also the photos in Kresten, "Correctiunculae", after p. 272.

29 Dölger, *Regesten 1341–1453*, no. 3284.

30 Dölger, *Regesten 1282–1341*, nos. 2565, 2566.

31 Dölger, *Regesten 1341–1453*, no. 3513.

32 Dölger, "Kodikellos" (in id., *Byzantinische Diplomatik*), pp. 3–26, 34–39; Babinger/Dölger, "Ein Auslandsbrief"; Dölger, "Form des Auslandsschreibens", pp. 83–90; Dölger/Karayannopulos, *Byzantinische Urkundenlehre*, pp. 89–94.

documents, although the terminology used by the Byzantines themselves is, as always, elusive and the letters have much in common with other products of the imperial chancery. Through a careful analysis of the organization and working principles of the imperial chancery in the late Byzantine period, Nicolas Oikonomidès further advanced our knowledge of the institutional framework in which imperial letters were produced.[33] In the early 1990s, a research project of Otto Kresten and Andreas Müller on the diplomatic letters of the Byzantine emperors in the eleventh and twelfth century (1025–1204) questioned and modified many of Dölger's views and findings by re-examining the entire material of original letters, diplomatic and literary copies, and additional information provided by narrative sources. However regrettable it may be that the announced edition of all surviving letters never appeared in print, the project resulted in a number of ground-breaking articles providing thorough in-depth studies of the letters' form and contents along with the editions of selected examples. In parallel, Christian Gastgeber published a number of articles on Latin translators in the imperial chancery during the reign of the Komnenoi and Angeloi emperors, investigating institutional and linguistic aspects of the production of authentic translations accompanying the Greek texts of letters issued by the imperial chancery.[34] All in all, besides a great step forwards in the field of Byzantine diplomatics as a whole, these research endeavors laid the foundation for new methodological approaches, replacing Dölger's frequently quite schematic presentations of characteristics with interpretations allowing for the scarcity and the particularities of the surviving evidence and pointing out the possibilities of evaluating these texts through the analysis of linguistic aspects and formulaic patterns. Following the same path, Luca Pieralli in 2006 published the revised version of his PhD thesis, offering a fresh analysis and new edition of the diplomatic correspondence of the Byzantine emperors with western powers in the thirteenth century.[35] Going far beyond the narrow scope of diplomatic letters in the strict sense, this study also includes treaties, letters of authorization for ambassadors (*procuratoria*), and Michael VIII's professions of faith made in the context of the Council of Lyon in 1274. Hence, on the basis of the aforementioned studies and monographs, we are now able to follow all traceable trends and changes in the development of imperial diplomatic letters over the crucial period from the eleventh century until the end

33 Oikonomidès, "Chancellerie Imperiale".

34 Gastgeber, "Lateinische Übersetzungsabteilung", pp. 105–22 (with further bibliographical references).

35 Pieralli, *Corrispondenza diplomatica*, pp. 3–106 (presentation of documents, internal and external characteristics, the translation section in the imperial chancery), 115–431 (nos. 1–28 with five appendices).

of Michael VIII's reign, towards the last years of which the monolingual letter in Latin made its appearance. This innovation has to be seen in connection with more general political and ideological changes in the relations between Byzantium and the western powers during the second half of the thirteenth century and, more specifically, with the simultaneous emergence of a new type of treaty, replacing the traditional privilege charter (*chrysoboullos logos*) with a bilateral agreement based on mutual oaths of the emperor and his treaty partners. Treaties retained their bilingual character, but the Greek and Latin texts were arranged face-to-face.[36]

From a formal point of view, diplomatic letters share a number of features with other types of imperial documents furnished with letter-like elements. For instance, the few known full-text examples of letters from the sixth and seventh century have a protocol very similar to that of law decrees (*nearai*, *edikta*), something that can be explained by the fact that both types morphologically are closely related to the late antique *epistulae*, i.e., imperial responses to legal queries addressed to specific individuals.[37] In the final section (*eschatocol*), we come across a red-colored *Legimus* ("we have read") written by the emperor's hand in the imperial letter of Saint Denis.[38] This element, the use of which is attested in a number of trustworthy copies of imperial laws and letters issued between the sixth and the ninth century, can also be found in eleventh- and twelfth-century *chrysoboulloi logoi*, in which they serve as a sign of corroboration ("Rekognitionszeichen") on the part of the imperial chancery.[39] The original letters of the twelfth century in the closing protocol bear the so-called μηνολόγημα, a formula indicating the month and the *indiction* in which the document was issued, and serving as a signature written by the emperor's hand. It figures prominently in letters of safe-conduct (*sigillia*) and in imperial orders (*prostagmata*) transmitted since the early thirteenth century.[40] Given that the *kodikellos* for Christodoulos of Palermo from 1109 is the only surviving example of its kind, it is impossible to say whether this piece represents a whole category of imperial administrative acts issued on a regular basis or was a rarely used exceptional type strictly limited to especially high-ranking foreign dignitaries.[41] The employment of the most precious writing material – gold ink on purple-colored parchment – in conjunction with the *menologema* signature, the ἀπελύθη formula mentioning the date of the

36 Dölger/Karayannopulos, *Byzantinische Urkundenlehre*, pp. 99–101.
37 Ibid., pp. 71–81, 89, 91.
38 Dölger/Müller, *Regesten 565–867*, no. 413.
39 Dölger, "Kodikellos" (in id., *Byzantinische Diplomatik*), pp. 16–24.
40 Dölger/Karayannopulos, *Byzantinische Urkundenlehre*, pp. 109–15.
41 For its text, see Dölger, "Kodikellos" (in id., *Byzantinische Diplomatik*), pp. 2–3.

document's dispatch from Constantinople, and the address on the verso make the document, in both its outward appearance and final section, very similar to the twelfth-century exemplars of solemn diplomatic letters. We cannot say with certainty, however, whether there actually was a genuine proximity between solemn letters and *kodikelloi* or this impression is merely due to the coincidental availability of the document in question.

Be that as it may, as Otto Kresten has pointed out, the classical type of the solemn diplomatic letters resulted from historical developments in the use of writing materials and working practices in the imperial chancery. Apart from the three exemplars from the Vatican Archive, it is well documented in various narrative sources dating to the period between 938 (Arabic chronicles referring to a Byzantine embassy in this year) and 1176/1177 (the *Annals* of Albert of Stade mentioning a letter of Manuel I to Frederick I Barbarossa). It is obvious that the imperial letter of Saint Denis dating to 827/843 represents an older type more oriented towards late antique Roman models. Therefore, between the ninth and the tenth century a fundamental change must have taken place, which most probably has to be seen in conjunction with the transition from papyrus to paper as the principle writing surface used in the imperial chancery. It is hard to define the chronological frame for this transition, but certain indications point to the reign of Emperor Basil I.[42]

The abolition of solemn diplomatic letters is illustrated by another original document of much more modest appearance, which in 1188 was sent to Baldwin Guercio in Genoa and was written with normal black ink on paper, retaining only the *menologema* signature and the address on the verso.[43] Are we dealing here with a new change in the working principles of the imperial chancery or even with an ideological decay?[44] Once more, we do not know what happened between 1177 and 1188. Was there a conscious decision to switch from one type to another in the years following Manuel I's death? Are we led to false conclusions by the available documents, which in one case are addressed to the pope, one of the most high-ranking recipients of Western Christianity, and in another to dignitaries of Genoa, who hierarchically rank much lower? The fact is that all known exemplars of the solemn type, apart from the pope, were addressed either to the German emperor or to the Abbasid caliph. Numerous letters known from copies or literary sources do not contain any information about their original outward appearance. In a few cases we definitely know

42 Kresten, "Chrysographie", pp. 178–80.

43 Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten 1025–1204*, no. 1582.

44 Kresten, "Chrysographie", p. 176: "Alles in allem liegt hier ein tiefer ideologischer Absturz vor, der von der einstigen imperialen Prachtentfaltung … absolut nichts übrig ließ."

that the letters were issued in a modest form, sometimes even as monolingual texts written in the language of the recipient and validated by the red signature of the emperor.[45] Given the complexity and density of Constantinople's relations with its neighbors and diplomatic partners, it seems highly unlikely that the imperial chancery, for every addressee irrespective of his standing and significance, would have constantly used the most expensive writing material. For this reason I would argue that the scribes made parallel use of a modest and a solemn type of imperial letter, and could switch between the two. The choice depended upon the rank of the recipient and perhaps the precariousness of the political situation.

It is also noteworthy that certain late antique practices, which at some point were abandoned or fell into oblivion, could be revived later on. The emperor's triumphal titles used in late antique protocols, for instance, can be found for the last time in the imperial *sacra* of Constantine IV to Pope Donus from August 678.[46] In the eighth century we come across new forms of the emperor's self-characterization in letters, and the protocols transmitted in the so-called *Book of Ceremonies* dating to the middle of the tenth century show much shorter formulas consisting of a devotional phrase ("believing in Christ, God", πιστὸς ἐν Χριστῷ τῷ θεῷ) and three key terms pertaining to the semantic field of imperial authority, i.e., αὐτοκράτωρ, αὔγουστος, βασιλεύς.[47] The imperial *intitulatio* used in twelfth-century letters of the Komnenian and Angeloi period, however, reintroduced a number of features originating from late antique titles, and combined them with newly created epithets partly responding to contemporary claims posed by the western chancery of the Hohenstaufen emperors.[48] Likewise, a salutation formula concluding the body of the text, which is documented until 871, reappeared in the twelfth century.[49] Diplomatic letters, as all other categories of Byzantine imperial documents, were neither static nor uniform. Various types were used according to the requirements of certain contact situations, and a creative dialogue with a centuries-long tradition offered the opportunity to revive elements of the past within a different context and with a new meaning. As regards the text of most surviving letters, one should avoid referring to the structural parts used for legal documents, such as the rhetorical introduction (*prooimion*, *arenga*), the presentation of the matter under discussion (*narratio*), the decision (*dispositio*), threats

45 Dölger/Müller, *Regesten 867–1025*, no. 707c.
46 Dölger/Müller, *Regesten 565–867*, no. 242.
47 Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *De cerimoniis* 2.48, ed. Reiske, pp. 686–92.
48 Kresten, "Anredestreit", pp. 82–91.
49 Dölger/Karayannopulos, *Byzantinische Urkundenlehre*, pp. 93–94.

of secular or spiritual punishment (*sanctio*), and so on.[50] Letters were freely formulated, depending on the circumstances and purposes of the emperor's correspondence. They could be simple messages concerning embassies, negotiations, and other official contacts, or rhetorically embellished masterpieces composed by the most experienced men of letters at the imperial court. They could convey specific wishes or intentions of the imperial government or very general principles of the Byzantine imperial ideology. As a rule, an especially splendid outward appearance usually goes hand in hand with a highly rhetorical content, while pieces with modest external characteristics tend to be more specific in their messages. The most important issues, however, were discussed orally in confidential meetings and conversations.

4 The Secondary Transmission: Copies, Translations, Quotations

Irrespective of the high value of the surviving original exemplars, were our knowledge of Byzantine diplomatic letters limited to them, we would have an extremely fragmentary image of how the imperial chancery communicated with the outside world. Except for the letter of Saint Denis, we have no original letter sent to the Western Empire, no letter addressed to a ruler in the Balkans and the wider Slavic Orthodox world of Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Poland, Rus of Kiev, etc.), no letter to a potentate of Caucasia, and no letter to an Arab or Turkish Muslim ruler. The secondary tradition on all levels, thus, constitutes an indispensable substitute for this scantiness of original material. In contrast to the medieval West, where studies in diplomatics frequently have to cope with an insurmountable mass of material, specialists of Byzantine documents are constantly hunting for more evidence, which has to be gained from a broad range of written sources composed in almost all languages used in medieval Europe and the Near East. This is certainly challenging, but also raises many methodological questions. These, in one way or another, are related to the further fate of written documents from the time they left the issuing chancery and were handed over to the recipient. From this moment onwards the documents in question pass from the stage of making to that of keeping and using by people who had access to and were interested in them.[51] The preservation of official documents in general has much to do with the continuity of administrative structures and institutions established

50 Ibid., pp. 48–49.

51 For this model and its theoretical implications, see Hildbrand, "Quellenkritik in der Zeitdimension" and Beihammer, "Reiner christlicher König".

by political entities and ruling elites. No doubt, most of the Byzantine imperial letters, which throughout the empire's existence were sent to various recipients in the Eurasian orbit, were lost because of the demise of these potentates and their institutional basis in the wake of campaigns and conquests or natural catastrophes. In contrast to the Balkans, Anatolia, and the Middle East, which until the Ottoman conquest underwent numerous violent upheavals and devastations, the institutional structures in Italy, Spain, and Western Europe in general have a much more unbroken continuity. Furthermore, the keeping of documents also depended upon their immediate relevance for political, legal, or other practical issues pursued by their owners. It may be assumed, for instance, that many letters issued by the imperial court of Constantinople, after the end of a diplomatic mission and the lapse of a certain period, lost their significance and there was no longer any reason to take care of them. The three Komnenian letters preserved in the Vatican Archive apparently survive not because of their political significance – issues concerning Church Union and the Second Crusade were too ephemeral to have political value long after these contacts – but because of their magnificent design, making them outstanding pieces of art. To a certain degree, transmission is also a matter of coincidence, allowing the survival of documents under favorable conditions. This may apply to the letter written by Emperor John VIII in 1447 to Sarūca Bey, as neither the content nor the outward appearance would have justified its preservation. For reasons that in retrospect cannot be reconstructed, however, the piece made its way from Murād II's court in Adrianople, where it was translated into Ottoman Turkish, to Meḥmed II's new residence in the imperial city, where it was deposited in the archive of the sultan's palace.[52] Given that the palace's oldest part, the so-called Çinili Köşk or Tiled Kiosk, dates from 1472 and thus was built during the last phase of Meḥmed II's rule,[53] it is all the more astonishing that this letter, along with the archival material of the Ottoman central administration, for more than twenty years was transferred to various places until it found its final destination.

As regards the further use of letters by the addressees and their entourage, there is a broad spectrum of possibilities, such as making copies into registers, formularies, or letter collections, making translations, quoting excerpts, or producing summaries in official reports and chronicles. Once the letters are delivered, they escape the control of their authors and the new owners can make use of them at their discretion. What counts is the way in which recipients and later users diachronically perceive and interpret the contents of letters in the

52 Babinger/Dölger, "Ein Auslandsbrief".

53 For details, see Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, pp. 212–17.

light of their changing intellectual and ideological environment. Letters of high political significance could always serve as a means to convey important messages to an audience, being in the reach of certain users. Copying letters normally entailed the omission of formulas used in the address, the protocol, and the final section of letters, because scribes were mainly interested in the gist of a written message or the body of the text. Many copyists were even stricter in their choice, omitting essential parts of a letter in favor of certain phrases and statements they wished especially to emphasize. As a result, the criteria on the basis of which scribes made their selection largely determine our knowledge of a letter's purpose and content. In many cases, the original wording of a letter could be reduced to short quotations or brief summaries. In its most extreme form, this reduction could consist of a simple note to the effect that a letter was sent or received without referring to its content. Furthermore, the meaning of quotations or summaries could be quite far removed from the original version or could even reflect intentional misinterpretations. In the context of historical narratives and chronicles in particular, one always has to reckon with additions of fictitious material, inventions, and forgeries. An author referring to a letter did not necessarily have access to the original version, nor did he always have a specific text in mind. Frequently, he merely copied passages of older sources or used letters just like dialogues of direct speech as a narrative device. At times, copyists noted some remarkable characteristics of a letter's outward appearance, but these observations are usually quite fragmentary and ambiguous, thus leaving much room for uncertainty and contradictory interpretations.

Let us have a closer look at some examples: The *Alexias* of Anna Komnene written in about 1140 transmits the text of a letter of Emperor Alexios I to King Henry IV of Germany, which was dispatched along with the embassy of Constantine Choirosphaktes in the spring of 1083. As Otto Kresten has convincingly demonstrated, this piece is a totally reliable copy of the original text, which in all details – the emperor's self-designation, the titulature and abstract terms used for the addressee, Byzantine technical terms, concluding wishes, the list of gifts, and historical facts – fully corresponds with eleventh- and twelfth-century chancery practices. This is in accordance with the way in which the author uses other official documents in her work. Given that Anna Komnene composed her work about fifty years after her father came to power, it can be assumed that the imperial court in the 1130/40s kept registers containing copies of important imperial documents from the correspondence with foreign rulers.[54] Anna largely retained the original wording, merely omitting

54 Kresten, "Auslandsschreiben", pp. 23–37; for the letter, see Dölger-Wirth, *Regesten 1025–1204*, no. 1077 (with an erroneous dating to early 1082).

the address and the ἀπελύθη formula. This is by no means the usual practice applied by all Byzantine historians, as a glance into the slightly later work of John Kinnamos, the author of a history of the reigns of John II and Manuel I composed in about 1180, teaches us. Although this author in his capacity as "imperial secretary" (βασιλικὸς γραμματικός) undoubtedly had access to collections of official documents, he chose a totally different approach to this material in the context of his historical work. Kinnamos refers to thirteen imperial letters from the years 1146–1174 addressed to a large group of recipients, including Seljuk sultans of Konya, the German Emperor Conrad III, and the kings of Jerusalem, Sicily and Hungary. As regards formulaic patterns and rhetorical conventions, it is obvious that the textual elements cited by Kinnamos do not reflect the practices of the imperial chancery. Just as with direct speeches, the author frequently uses letters as a narrative device following the rules of Byzantine *ethopoiia*, which presents exemplary forms of behavior and statements of protagonists rather than facts. Nevertheless, the author seems to have retained a core of historicity referring to actual events and letters, which, in their original form, may have had some similarities with what Kinnamos relates.[55] Generally speaking, it seems that Anna Komnene's full quotations of imperial documents are a rare phenomenon in middle-Byzantine historiography, while Kinnamos' approach seems to be more or less the rule. The entire tradition from Theophanes the Confessor in the early ninth century until George Akropolites in the second half of the thirteenth contains hardly any full-length quotations of Byzantine imperial letters, in spite of numerous references to all sorts of diplomatic contacts, letter exchanges, and treaty making. In the early Byzantine period up to the *Chronicon Paschale* and Theophylaktos Simokattes from the early seventh century, authors are more likely to include official documents and letters in their accounts.[56] As for the late Byzantine period, the individual works differ too much in their character and style to make a generally applicable statement.

A source *sui generis* and the only surviving normative text concerning the composition of diplomatic letters in the imperial chancery is the well-known chapter II 48 of Constantine VII's *Book of Ceremonies* entitled "The formulas of the addresses used for the foreigner" (Τὰ ἄκτα τῶν εἰς τοὺς ἐθνικοὺς γενομένων ἐπιγραφῶν).[57] This list of recipients reflects the widely ramified network of contacts in the imperial court's diplomatic correspondence at about the middle of the tenth century as well as the hierarchical thinking of Constantinople,

55 Kresten, "Auslandsschreiben", pp. 37–44.

56 See for instance, Dölger/Müller, Regesten 565–867, nos. 111a, 166, 192. For Byzantine-Sassanid correspondence and its characteristics, see Piras, "Ritualità della communicazione".

57 Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *De cerimoniis* 2.48, ed. Reiske, pp. 686–92.

as is expressed in the titulatures of the address formulas and the weight of the imperial seals accompanying the respective letters. The catalogue includes the pope of Rome and the patriarchs of the East, the Abbasid caliph, potentates in Armenia, Georgia, and other provinces of Caucasia and the Black Sea region, the ecclesiastical leaders (*katholikoi*) of the Armenian and Georgian Churches, kings of the Carolingian Empire and its successor states, the Arab lords of Africa (i.e., the Fatimid caliph) and Egypt, the *archon* of Sardinia, the doge of Venice, sovereigns in southern Italy, the rulers of Bulgaria, Khazaria, the Rus of Kiev, the Turks and the Pechenegs, Slav potentates in Serbia, Croatia, and Moravia, and, finally, the lords of India and Southern Arabia.[58] The entire circle of foreign rulers who were in contact with the imperial government falls into two categories, namely those potentates who were formally dependent upon Constantinople and thus received "orders" (*keleuseis*) from the Christ-loving lords (ἐκ τῶν φιλοχρίστων δεσποτῶν); and those who were formally independent from Constantinople and thus are addressed with terms of spiritual kinship projecting the idea of a family of kings headed by the emperor as father.[59] A special status is conceded to the pope of Rome, who is the emperor's "spiritual father"; and the Abbasid caliph, who is the "supreme councilor and commander of the Hagarens" without any personal relationship with the emperor, and the only foreign ruler whose *intitulatio* could precede the titles of the emperor. Moreover, the caliph was the only ruler whose golden seals amounted to a weight of four *solidi*, while most potentates received seals weighing between two and three *solidi*. A connecting link between complete otherness and spiritual kinship was the address "beloved friend" employed for the emir of Egypt, in this case the ruling representative of the Ikhshīdid dynasty, who, because of his semi-independent status vis-à-vis Baghdad and the country's outstanding significance for the political situation in Syria and the borderlands, enjoyed high esteem in mid-tenth century Constantinople.

Another way of reproducing the content of letters is translation into another language. The Byzantine imperial chancery, at least until the second half of the thirteenth century, tried to forestall intended or coincidental misunderstandings by attaching to the original Greek versions authentic translations produced in the imperial chancery. The scholarly literature often talks about a foreign language department in the imperial chancery,[60] which perhaps

58 On the western recipients in *De cerimoniis* 2.48, see Ohnsorge, "Drei Deperdita"; on the Caucasian lords, see Martin-Hisard, "Constantinople et les archontes du monde caucasien" and Zuckerman, "À propos du *Livre des Cérémonies*, II, 48".

59 Dölger, "Die Familie der Könige". For recent critique of this concept, see Brandes, "Die »Familie der Könige« im Mittelalter".

60 Gastgeber, "Lateinische Übersetzungsabteilung", pp. 105–22.

implies a degree of bureaucratization which does not really correspond to medieval realities. Whatever the case, the linguistic and paleographic analysis of the available letters allows the identification of a number of individuals working for that purpose in the imperial chancery. For the twelfth century it can be assumed that many of these people were of Italian origin and well versed in the use of the Latin language, but there were also Greek translators with a limited knowledge of Latin.[61] As regards the correspondence with the West, the available evidence from 1279 onwards points to an almost exclusive use of the Latin language,[62] but given that the surviving thirteenth-century exemplars of Greek texts are mostly confessions of faith, it is likely that this new practice appeared earlier, perhaps already after 1204. The reason may be located in the strong presence of Italian communities and western notaries in post-1204 Constantinople. From the reign of Michael VIII (1259–1282) onwards the people charged with the composition of treaties with western powers and letters addressed to western rulers were Latin notaries working in the emperor's service and, somewhat later, Venetian or Genoese notaries endowed with imperial authorization.[63] As for other languages, the available evidence is scarce. A number of reports in Arabic chronicles refer to bilingual Greek-Arabic documents dating between 938 and 1074, the outward appearance of which seems to have been similar to the twelfth-century pieces sent to the Apostolic See. We do not know whether this practice was continued into the twelfth century. The unique surviving full-text translation from that period is a letter of Emperor Isaac II to Sultan Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, most probably dating to the spring/early summer 1190. The text is quoted by a contemporary Arab chronicler, Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād, who mentions an interpreter (*turjumān*) accompanying the Byzantine embassy, but does not explicitly state whether the Arabic version was composed in Constantinople or in the camp of the sultan.[64] Another Arabic version of an imperial letter is a piece of Manuel II written in the year 1411 to the Mamluk Sultan al-Nāṣir Nāṣir al-Dīn Faraj. The chancery manual of the Egyptian author al-Qalqashandī explicitly states that it was the Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria who made the translation under the supervision of a Muslim translator at the sultan's court.[65] There is clear evidence that the Seljuk sultanate of Konya, from the early thirteenth

61 Ibid., pp. 107–11.

62 Dölger/Karayannopoulos, *Byzantinische Urkundenlehre*, p. 91.

63 Oikonomidès, "Chancellerie imperiale", pp. 172–73.

64 For details, see Beihammer, "Der byzantinische Kaiser hat doch noch nie was zustande gebracht"; Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten 1025–1204*, no. 1601 (erroneously dated to December 1189).

65 For a detailed analysis of this letter and its political context, see Kresten, "Correctiunculae", pp. 267–68; Dölger, *Regesten 1341–1453*, no. 3328.

century onwards, communicated with Christian rulers in the Greek language, as is attested by surviving copies from the correspondence with the Lusignan Kingdom of Cyprus. In doing so, the court of Konya employed Greek officials and scribes, who were well acquainted with the forms of expression and ideological nuances of the Byzantine imperial chancery.[66] A similar practice can be observed in the Turkmen *beyliks* of Aydin and Menteshe, which in their commercial treaties with Venice from the fourteenth and early fifteenth century also used the Greek language.[67] Hence, it may be assumed that already in the twelfth century the diplomatic correspondence between Byzantium and the Turkish-Muslim principalities of Anatolia had been conducted in Greek by using people from the Greek-speaking indigenous population of Asia Minor, many of whom served as officials at the court of Konya. The overall impression is that, while the imperial chancery in its contacts with western potentates turned to the Latin language, Greek became the principle language of Christian-Muslim diplomacy in the East.

In non-Greek chronicles, chancery handbooks, and letter compilations the situation concerning the transmission of Byzantine imperial letters is very uneven. A case in point is a letter of Constantine X Doukas to the antipope Honorius II (Cadalus of Parma) transmitted in Benzo of Alba's work *Ad Heinricum IV imperatorem libri VII* composed in the years 1085–1090. The letter, allegedly written in 1063, refers to the newly emerging threat of the Normans and the perspectives of an alliance between Byzantium and Henry IV to be achieved with the help of Pope Honorius.[68] The authenticity of this document is controversially discussed in the scholarly bibliography. Most probably, there actually were contacts between the Byzantine imperial court and the antipope at that time, but it is inconceivable to assume that the emperor would have accepted the preeminence of the Roman Church by addressing the recipient *Romano patriarche, regia constitutione super universali ecclesia sublimato* ("to the Roman patriarch, who by royal constitution has been elevated above the universal church") while putting his own titles in the second place. Moreover, in speaking about the liberation of the Holy Sepulcher, the text alludes to a sort of crusader ideology, which did not exist in the early 1060s. Hence we come across an attempt to adjust an imperial letter to the needs and

66 *Greek Letters from Cyprus*, nos. 19–21, 83, ed. Beihammer.

67 Zachariadou, *Trade and Crusade*, pp. 185–86 and no. IV, pp. 201–04 for a surviving Greek version.

68 Dölger-Wirth, *Regesten 1025–1204*, no. 952; Kresten, "Auslandsschreiben", p. 25, n. 17; Bayer, *Spaltung der Christenheit*, Cologne 2002, pp. 125–31.

ideological tendencies of the recipient's environment some thirty years after the event and to project certain ideas back into the past.

An example of a complete invention of an imperial letter for propagandistic reasons is the letter of Emperor Alexios I to Count Robert of Flanders, which is transmitted in several slightly differing Latin versions. Again there is a long and controversial discussion about the letter's authenticity and its possible fictitious and historical elements. There are some allusions to historical facts of the 1080s, but an analysis of formulaic patterns and phrases clearly demonstrates that a Byzantine emperor would have never communicated in that way with a western count or a foreign recipient in general.[69]

Arabic narrative sources present similar difficulties of interpretation, though the cultural and ideological context is of course very different. The antagonism between Islam and Christianity, competing concepts of universal sovereignty and empire, and ideas of Muslim jihad or Holy War certainly have their impact on Muslim authors commenting on the relations with the Byzantine ruler as the supreme secular representative of the Christian World. In addition, one has to take into account the particularities of Arabic historiography, the oldest surviving works of which were composed approximately 150–200 years after the emergence of Islam and have the character of vast compilations of mostly brief and incoherent accounts (*akhbār*) arranged under the names of chains of transmitters.[70] In these reports the Byzantine emperor repeatedly appears as corresponding with his officials in the eastern provinces, the Arab caliphs and their military commanders during the conquest period. As some of these reports are confirmed by independent Byzantine or Syriac sources, there is a certain probability that the authors are citing reliable sources, but it is self-evident that no Arab author of the early period could ever have had access to a Byzantine imperial letter. Hence, we are mainly dealing with a literary motif.[71] From the Abbasid historiography of the ninth century onwards, the character of Arabic historical narratives gradually changed and developed an annalistic style listing events in strict chronological order. Among these entries, the Byzantine Empire, the annual raids in Asia Minor, armistices, and exchanges of prisoners always figure prominently in the accounts concerning the borderlands of Northern Syria and Upper Mesopotamia. Works pertaining to the court historiography of Abbasid Baghdad or Umayyad Spain also tell us about the reception of Byzantine embassies and the imperial letters they

69 Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten 1025–1204*, no. 1152; Schreiner, "Der Brief des Alexios I. Komnenos", pp. 111–40; Gastgeber, "Das Schreiben Alexios' I. Komnenos", pp. 141–85.

70 For details, see Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*.

71 For details and numerous examples, see Beihammer, *Nachrichten*.

brought with them. In this context, Arab chroniclers were interested not so much in the exact contents of the letters, but mainly in outstanding formulas and striking elements of their outward appearance. The Arabic accounts of the 938 embassy to Baghdad, for instance, describe the use of gold and silver ink, which obviously was written on purple-colored parchment, and the bilingual composition of the letter in Greek and Arabic. They quote the address, including the *intitulatio* of Romanos I and his co-emperors, the *invocatio*, parts of the rhetorical introduction of the text, and a detailed list of gifts accompanying the embassy, which seems to have been translated at the caliphal court.[72] The reports about the Spanish embassy of 947/948 equally refer to the use of gold and silver ink, explicitly mentioning the purple-colored parchment. A difference in comparison to the aforementioned document lies in the fact that here the silver ink was used not for the Arabic translation but for the list of gifts, which was used as the cover of the letter. Furthermore, the reports mention Emperor Constantine VII's enclosed golden seal as well as a silver cassette decorated with the emperor's image and a velvet-covered box, which were used for the storage and transport of these precious items. As for the text itself, they merely quote the address and passages of the list of gifts. Other accounts about bilingual imperial letters written with the use of gold and silver ink can be found in later sources referring to the rise of the Seljuk Empire, which puts the court of Baghdad once more in the center of diplomatic endeavors on the part of the imperial government of Constantinople.[73] Arab-Muslim observers thus showed a great sensibility for the material aspects of Byzantine imperial letters, giving us quite detailed and trustworthy descriptions, which allow us to reconstruct not only parts of the appearance of these letters but also the ceremonial aspects of their deliverance. It is also remarkable that, despite some common features reappearing in all known exemplars, there was also a certain variation regarding the use of the ink and the decorative aspects of the letters. Obviously, there was no standard type of diplomatic letter addressed to Arab caliphs, but the imperial chancery each time designed a new and unique piece of art corresponding to the position of the recipient.

Modern scholars have to be extremely careful in evaluating these texts. Quotations, summaries and translations have to be scrutinized against the background of a twofold analytical matrix, which, on the one hand, takes into account the particularities and conceptual context of the accounts referring to a specific letter and, on the other, compares the available texts and fragments with what we know about the norms and modes of expression in the Byzantine

72 Dölger/Müller, *Regesten 867–1025*, no. 633.

73 For details, see Beihammer, "Transkulturelle Kommunikation", pp. 180–81.

imperial chancery. The classical methods of *veri ac falsi discrimen* in diplomatics, which explore a document's accordance with the working principles of a chancery through the comparison of internal and external characteristics, are, of course, much less effective when the available evidence consists of not more than a few phrases. In many cases, however, it is still possible to arrive at important conclusions.

5 Greek Letter Writing and Byzantine Chancery Practices outside Byzantium

Byzantine diplomatic letters and the products of the imperial chancery in general doubtlessly exerted various degrees of influence on the chancery practices of potentates in Europe and the regions of the Byzantine sphere. On certain occasions of outstanding ideological significance, German emperors and other western rulers adopted the practice of issuing charters written with gold ink on a purple parchment surface, the best-known examples being perhaps Otto I's privilege dating to 962 for the Roman Church and Otto II's marriage certificate issued in 972 for his Byzantine wife Theophanou.[74] In these and similar cases, the adoption consisted of embedding external characteristics of solemn diplomatic letters into the context of western privilege charters, thus transcending the typological confines drawn by the imperial chancery. Specialists of western diplomatics argue that these pieces should not be considered original documents, but copies issued in a particularly splendid manner for propagandistic purposes.

A new dimension in the dissemination of Byzantine chancery practices and the adoption of the Greek language as a means of international communication resulted from the establishment of successor states in former Byzantine provinces from the late eleventh century onwards. The Norman state in Southern Italy and Sicily, the Seljuk sultanate of Konya, the kingdom of Armenian Cilicia, and the Lusignan kingdom of Cyprus developed various forms of communication with their Greek-speaking subjects by incorporating elements of the pre-existing Byzantine administrative and chancery practices with the aid of groups of Greek officials. Similar phenomena can be observed in the Latin Empire of Constantinople (1204–1261), its Frankish vassal states and the Venetian colonial administration in Greece. Of course, these processes

74 For the use of purple colored charters in the west, see Brühl, "Purpururkunden"; for the scholarly discussion on Theophanou's marriage certification, see Schulze, *Die Heiratsurkunde der Kaiserin Theophanu*.

of adoption and transformation in each of the aforementioned entities led to different results, depending on pre-existing social structures and the particularities of the respective regions. Norman Sicily, for instance, created a complex trilingual administration; the royal chancery in the kingdom of Cyprus switched between Byzantine and Latin forms of expression; in other areas one observes only occasional adoptions of Byzantine imperial elements.[75] Common to all these courts and administrative systems is the attempt to find workable solutions through a cross-fertilization of imported and local traditions and the combination of European, Muslim, and Byzantine chancery practices. In this context, the Greek language and elements of the Byzantine diplomatic letter continued to be used as an effective tool of communication among ruling elites in the Eastern Mediterranean up to the time of the Ottoman Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566).[76]

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75 For these phenomena, see the contributions collected in Beihammer/Parani/Schabel, *Diplomatics in the Eastern Mediterranean*.

76 For Greek documents in the Ottoman chancery, see Lefort, *Documents grecs*.

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CHAPTER 8

Didacticism in Byzantine Epistolography

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1 Introduction

It seems unquestionable that instruction in a wide range of topics formed one of the central concerns of many Byzantine authors. Along with the handbooks inherited from antiquity and copied intensely in Byzantium, other specialized writings were aimed at shaping the conduct, the beliefs, or the worldview of their recipients.[1] Whether trying to instill principles of Christian behavior, or to explain technical concepts, many writers used a didactic approach tailored to the needs of their students or potential audience. It also seems unquestionable, particularly for a modern reader, that instruction was by necessity performed in a systematic way achievable only with the help of certain textual tools (handbooks, lexica, anthologies of wise sentences, etc.). Purportedly, only such writings allowed one to effectively impart knowledge, teach skills, or develop model virtues. Yet, the assumption that instruction exclusively represented a matter of systematic epistemic elaboration is only partially true for the pre-modern world.[2] If we limit ourselves to Byzantium where instruction was often carried out on an individual basis and the circulation of information in written form was limited, teachers had to resort to alternative means of education. Frequently, writers provided instruction which, for various reasons, was inappropriate for treatment in the form of extensive manuals. This was especially the case with the moral and spiritual advice which could not be explained by traditional methods.[3]

Among the Byzantine writings that included a didactic component, one also finds epistolography. Even if letters had a limited length and a small audience, the epistolary medium offered an edge to the writers who wished to

1 For examples of didacticism in Byzantine literature see Hörandner, "Teaching with Verse in Byzantium".
2 Feros-Ruys, "Introduction".
3 Historians often adopted a moralizing-didactic stance. In his *History*, Theophylact Simokates presented himself as a teacher of those who wished to know about the potential recurrence of similar situations in present or future. See Efthymiades, "A Historian and His Tragic Hero", p. 172. On the didactic purpose of Byzantine history see Simpson, "The Workshop of Niketas Choniates", pp. 265–66.

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transmit not only a sign of their attention or respect to the recipients but also information. Owing to the epistolographers' efforts to establish a connection with their addressees, such texts created the possibility of tighter relations between teachers and students. The epistolary mediation that rendered possible the communication between individuals at a distance explains why letters also frequently included advice on personal or public matters. Yet, if the frequent epistolary instances of advice and admonition (παραίνεσις) can be regarded as only a basic level of interpersonal instruction, one also encounters more systematic epistolary treatments with an open didactic character, that is, they were aimed at providing definitive and well-grounded views. In addition, the epistolary texts with didactic intent presented several distinct features such as the prominence of the author's voice contrasting the objectivity embedded in the regular handbooks used for describing various skills or areas of knowledge. In this chapter I will deal with the Byzantine letters that sought to instruct or to convey knowledge.

The didacticism present in Byzantine letters has received little scholarly attention, despite the fact that, several decades ago, Herbert Hunger noticed the pervasiveness of a pedagogical intention in letters. Hunger went as far as to define a category of "didactic letters"[4] which, however, for the purpose of the present discussion, remains only partially helpful because it covers a small amount of Byzantine letters with didactic content. On the other hand, in recent years, many scholars of medieval epistolography have argued convincingly that in Byzantium letters fulfilled more than one function. For example, often, they were meant as cover letters for a variety of gifts or simply as ways to maintain connections with people who found themselves at a distance. The letters used for instruction did not make an exception, since, as it will be shown here, they fulfilled other functions as well. Another issue that needs to be considered when looking at didactic letters is that among the letters where an underlying instructional design is detectable, only a few texts were specifically designated as didactic (e.g., the letters of Theophanes of Nicaea).

The Byzantines themselves were certainly no strangers to epistolary didacticism. In the letter-writing handbook of Pseudo-Libanios the didactic letter (διδασκαλικὴ ἐπιστολή) is listed among the epistolary types and is defined concisely as the letter "in which we teach someone something".[5] Furthermore, many Byzantine authors were familiar with the popular didactic philosophical letters of antiquity, like Epicurus' famous letter to Menoeceus. Above all, the

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4 Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 204–06.

5 Pseudo-Libanios, *Epistolary Styles*, ed. Foerster, p. 32, l. 2–3: διδασκαλικὴ δι' ἧς διδάσκομέν τινα περί τινος.

Pauline didactic epistles of the New Testament had a considerable impact on Byzantine religious didactic literature as they were frequently imitated or commented upon.[6]

The study of epistolary didacticism therefore requires a good understanding of its models and of a relevant range of elements which define them. One critical aspect that needs to be addressed when approaching didacticism in Byzantine epistolography[7] concerns the potential antagonism between the need to instruct and the epistolary character of the texts. While epistolarity is often understood as a textual phenomenon which reflects an attempt to obliterate physical distance and to attenuate differences of status between correspondents,[8] on the contrary, didacticism presupposes an act of reinforcing an asymmetrical type of relationship. Thus, the sender is not just an interlocutor but also a teacher invested with authority; conversely, in this scenario, the recipient takes the role of a student who accepts the sender's charismatic or epistemic authority. For this reason, since an efficient didactic communication is often linked to the teacher's authority, and epistolarity is charged with affective power and resonance, writers needed to adopt a paradoxical position that combined authority and affection.

Taking into account these concerns, the present analysis will look at didacticism and epistolarity as combined parameters. My overall approach involves several steps that aim at offering an overview of the content and the contexts of Byzantine didactic letters: the identification of the major instances of epistolary didacticism in Byzantine literature and the discussion of the strategies employed by authors of didactic letters. In addition, I will look at the didactic potential of epistolarity in Byzantium and highlight the idea that letters with didactic content did not follow an ideal model but responded to particular cultural and social contexts. In other words, didactic letters were not only about teaching as there is little evidence about their reception as fully instructional texts. Instead, they can help us understand other aspects as well: their recipients' status or the representations of their authors as experts in various areas of knowledge and practice.

With these goals in mind, the present chapter will represent an attempt to detect changing forms of epistolary didacticism across different periods and contexts. Since it is impossible to detect and discuss here all didactic letters

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6 The statement about didactic letters from *2 Corinthians* (10:10: Αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ μέν, φησίν, βαρεῖαι καὶ ἰσχυραί, ἡ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενὴς καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος) is often quoted by Byzantine authors.

7 On "epistolary situations" see Ysebaert, "Medieval Letters and Letter Collections", p. 54.

8 Altman, *Epistolarity*, pp. 13–43.

produced in Byzantium, I will try to cover only the most representative authors and writings dating from most periods of Byzantine literature, so that several patterns of didacticism in epistolary writing can be uncovered. Furthermore, although at first sight, the study may seem rather restricted to questions of Byzantine rhetorical strategies, it can also provide an alternative route into understanding Byzantine constructions of practical knowledge. Thus, it can open new avenues for the investigation of parallel structures of learning and the types of knowledge cultivated in Byzantium, topics that so far have been explored mostly by historians of education.[9]

2 Didacticism in Byzantium

A preliminary discussion of didacticism must take into consideration phenomena such as Byzantine education as well as the use of various literary frameworks. To facilitate a better understanding of the letters with instructional content, I will first briefly consider the field of Byzantine didacticism where a range of forms of teaching can be attested: from mass to individual education,[10] from instruction that provided a basic level of literacy to higher education institutions.[11] In all its forms, the Byzantine education required trained teachers whom we often find among well-educated scholars. Many teachers belonged to learned scholarly circles and participated in the intellectual life of Constantinople. Some instructors, like the tenth-century Anonymous professor, were active in their own schools for most of their lives. The state and the Church were sporadically involved in supporting forms of organized higher education. As for the most common subjects taught by Byzantine teachers, grammar and rhetoric were based on the study of ancient authors. Although occasionally certain anti-intellectual trends can be detected[12] and teachers complained about the difficulties of their activity, judging from the extant evidence, we can assume that teaching and teachers enjoyed a high prestige. It was not unusual that teachers gained access to higher social positions or that they obtained the admiration of subsequent generations of students.

Another aspect that needs consideration pertains to the genre of didacticism. As noted above, Byzantine didacticism does not appear exclusively in

9 E.g., Kazhdan, "Education"; Constantinides, *Higher Education*.
10 See Markopoulos, "Education".
11 Browning, "Teachers".
12 Especially connected to the hesychast movement in the fourteenth century, see Krausmüller, "The Rise of Hesychasm".

prescriptive texts. For example, aspects of Christian doctrine and conduct had to be taught with the help of texts quite different from those used in the system of institutionalized education. Similarly, other areas of knowledge like the more sophisticated elements of political science, which were not taught in traditional schools, had to be transmitted with alternative means.

Arguably, the Byzantines developed two distinct types of didacticism: a technical and an abstract one. On the one hand, the manuals that dealt with the acquisition of skills put forward a technical didacticism. Such were the rhetorical normative guides circulating in Byzantium or the military handbooks of the tenth century. They focused exclusively on their subject matter, cultivated clarity of speech, and avoided divagations. On the other hand, there also existed more theoretical didactic texts in which abstract principles, precepts, and less hard facts predominated. In such cases authors used complex rhetorical tropes to a greater extent, as well as sophisticated techniques to persuade readers of the validity of certain political or moral positions. The ensuing brief discussion will allow us subsequently to better assess the didactic strategies used in different types of letters with didactic content.

Let us first briefly look at the instances of technical didacticism. Treatises on the science of war and army organization were composed from the early years of Byzantium by authors who had the experience of armed conflicts. Later, these compositions, often preserved anonymously, were reproduced and adjusted to the needs of other times. In works like Maurice's *Strategikon* (seventh century) or Leo VI's *Taktika* (tenth century), authors treated *in extenso* the organization of infantry, cavalry, war tactics, equipment, skills, commands, and even ways to encourage soldiers on the battlefield.[13] A sixth-century military handbook begins with the systematic examination of the forms of government and of the ruling classes before dealing with war tactics.[14] Such texts were primarily aimed at providing clear-cut examples as well as definitions of useful military notions.

Another significant extant body of didactic technical texts was devoted to instilling the norms of writing and performing persuasive rhetorical compositions. Most educated authors, and especially those pursuing a public service career, were certainly familiar with at least some of the prescriptive handbooks of *progymnasmata* ("preliminary exercises") which explained different types of compositions: fable, narrative, anecdote, gnome, confirmation and refutation, praise, blame, comparisons, etc. These handbooks were designed for daily

13 Maurice, *Strategikon*, ed. Dennis, trans. Gamillscheg; Leo VI, *Taktika*, ed. and trans. Dennis.

14 *Anonymous Treatise on Strategy*, ed. and trans. Dennis.

usage by young students and included examples from the ancient authors. Like in the case of the military treatises, their statements were clearly articulated and relied on precise definitions of the terms used. The same kind of approach is to be found in the Byzantine textbooks on rhetoric, as for example in the rhetorical handbook by Joseph Rhakendytes, a fourteenth century rhetorician. Interestingly, Rhakendytes tried to facilitate the understanding of important aspects of rhetoric by creating a parallel between the various branches of this discipline and the body parts.[15]

Along with technical didacticism, there developed a different, more abstract kind of didacticism, preoccupied with ethical or spiritual issues. Noticeably, such didactic writings played a major role not only in individual education but also in social mobility. Authors used not only certified knowledge in the form of precepts and *exempla* but also expressions of their own selves, thereby establishing their public profile of teachers and claiming authority in a variety of areas: spiritual, political, or moral.

Among such didactic texts can be counted the popular collections of wise sayings, homilies, hagiography, or occasional texts of moral and political conduct. The *gnomologia* drew on the ancient, patristic, and Biblical wisdom and were often divided into thematic sections in order to be assimilated more easily. Owing to their wide circulation, the *gnomologia* were extensively used in the construction of a range of other texts like the so-called princely mirrors. However, these texts were not just incorporating or re-arranging pre-existing material, but often their authors also tried to address problems of their own times. Similar to such didactic texts were the secular moral and popular compositions dedicated to individuals, other than the members of the imperial family. Such was the case of Kekaumenos' *Strategikon* (eleventh century) or of John Chortasmenos' *Moral and Spiritual Counsels* (fourteenth/fifteenth century).[16] Both texts combined elements of personal experience and traditional tenets of moral or spiritual education.

Another category of didactic texts grew out of the need to disseminate Christian teaching and to define one's position vis-à-vis pagan learning.[17] Even if such texts had specific addressees they were often written for wider audiences. One of the most common examples, the homilies, aimed at explaining the Biblical meanings or at offering models of behavior to be followed in given

15 Joseph Rhakendytes, *Synopsis of Rhetoric* 1, ed. Walz, p. 478, l. 10–11: Ὡς γὰρ μέρη ἔχει τὸ σῶμα, οὕτω τὰ κεφάλαια <τῆς ῥητρικῆς>.

16 Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, ed. and trans. Roueché; John Chortasmenos, *Moral and Spiritual Counsels*, ed. Hunger.

17 Agapitos, "Teachers, Pupils and Imperial Power", p. 170.

circumstances.[18] Sometimes, homilists engaged in dialogues with their audiences and produced dramatized texts, and thus offered clear answers to the communities of believers.[19] That is why, unlike the authors of more technical didactic treatises, they were required to be more familiar with literary and rhetorical strategies in general and not just with the information they were conveying. Naturally, authoritative biblical and patristic quotations abounded and *exempla* were often invoked for teaching communities about moral or spiritual truths. By the same token, another category of religious texts, the saints lives, also taught through examples of virtuous saintly behavior.[20]

3 Letters and Didacticism

The above discussion indicates that as a feature pervasive in Byzantine literature, didacticism emerges in a multitude of genres and not only in those specifically dedicated to teaching. In order to come to a better understanding of the letters' underlying didactic intent, as well as of their epistolarity, the ensuing analysis will attempt to answer several interrelated questions. The first one pertains to the use of specific features of discourse management, such as the epistolary or didactic discourse organizers (formulae, expressions of self-belief, etc.).[21] The second question regards the extent of borrowing from other authors, a process at the heart of medieval literary activity. Conversely, the analysis will look at the authors' efforts to shape didactic messages, to represent themselves, and to achieve didactic authority. These questions will then serve as a basis for a presentation of the ways in which epistolarity and didacticism were combined to affect the recipients of the letters. Such issues will also allow us to understand the differences and the similarities between approaches across different periods and areas of expertise.

Instead of a chronological listing of the epistolographers, I will use here a thematic approach. I thus identify three main categories of such letters and devote a section to each of them: spiritual, technical, and moral-political. However, we should keep in mind that often these categories are not clear-cut, since in many cases their functions overlap. For instance, a letter with spiritual teaching can often serve political functions as well. Also, there are significant

18 Cunningham, "Homilies".
19 Cunningham, "Dramatic Device or Didactic Tool?".
20 On Byzantine hagiography as "didactic literature par excellence", see Constantinou, "Women Teachers", p. 189.
21 On didacticism and its modes in ancient letters, Morrison, "Didacticism and Epistolarity".

variations between the amount of epistolary didacticism extant in various authors: while in some writers we encounter few letters with pedagogical content, in other cases one has to deal with entire collections of such letters.

3.1 *Spiritual Didacticism*

The first area I will examine, that of spiritual didacticism, provides the most evidence for epistolary approaches. Isidore of Pelousion (d. 450) authored a collection of about 2,000 letters addressed to monks and laymen associated with his community in Egypt. Isidore was an educated monk and theologian whose texts and theological legacy in Byzantium evince his involvement in the doctrinary debates and administration of the early church. He undertook a leading role in ecclesiastic affairs at the time when monasticism emerged in Egypt and there was a need for regulating monastic communities.[22] Isidore's vast epistolary corpus is preserved in a unitary form designed by several contemporary monks,[23] and among the recipients of his letters we find local or Constantinopolitan officials,[24] monks or members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. As a result of the methods of collecting the letters, most of the 2,000 letters included material relevant for the spiritual formation of monastic communities. In terms of form and style, brevity of speech predominates as many letters amount to only short paragraphs resembling the educational κεφάλαια ("chapters").[25]

A glance at Isidore's letters indicates that didacticism was pervasive. As a store of ideas common to both the author and his readers, many of his letters contain interpretations of Biblical passages, religious parables, and moral advice. Admittedly, it can be read as a comprehensive didactic text offering answers to the moral and religious dilemmas which a monk or a layman could have faced. Owing to the variety of addressees and issues approached in the epistolary collection, Isidore applied a wide range of persuasive strategies and rhetorical devices to reinforce his didactic message. By and large, the composition of his letters followed two major scenarios. In the first model that resembles the ἐρωταποκρίσεις ("question-and-answer") texts,[26] Isidore indicates from

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22 Isidore, for instance, rebuked bishop Eusebios because he allowed too many people to found monasteries; see the introduction in Isidore of Pelousion, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 38.

23 Ibid., p. 94.

24 E.g., the letters to the emperor or the ones addressed to Rufinus, prefect of the praetorium; ibid., pp. 14–15.

25 Isidore often uses phrases such as 'I will speak briefly'; 'Suffice it to say'; 'I will use few words', etc.; see also ibid., p. 73. On the genre of κεφάλαια see Kiapidou, "Chapters, Epistolary Essays and Epistles", p. 49.

26 On this genre see Kiapidou, "Chapters, Epistolary Essays and Epistles", pp. 47–48.

the outset the issue he intends to explain. Thus, often the author expressly mentions that he had received a request for explaining certain Biblical passages with ethical implications and that, accordingly, his letter represents a response to the request.[27] In the second model, Isidore conveys spiritual instruction without giving any circumstantial details. In such cases, the didactic message comes in the form of vignettes where the moral implications are elaborated. In both models, the didactic epistolary responses combine his interpretations, often derived from personal experience with scriptural illustrations and exegetical points.[28]

In terms of epistolarity, Isidore frequently embeds at least one epistolary indicator: either an initial address to the intended recipient or a final salutation in which the author provides a few concluding remarks about the topic and the addressee. Isidore's didactic epistolarity suggest that he constantly adapted his teaching methods to the needs of the members of his community, establishing himself as a spiritual διδάσκαλος. Occasionally, he even offers insights into his didactic approach based on preaching practical wisdom. He notes for instance that there are individuals who misuse the Scriptures to promote their doctrinal deviations while he asserted the importance of practical wisdom as "the foundation of the edifice and the edifice itself."[29] Since little is known about other Isidorian texts, it is plausible that these letters constituted the main medium for conveying this image. Furthermore, the didacticism of his letters was certainly acknowledged as influential, since he became known for his pedagogical guidance. The letters selected to be compiled in a collection by the Pelusiote monks strongly indicates that he was regarded as a teacher. His missives had certainly an audience that extended beyond his immediate recipients, as they continued to be read throughout the Byzantine history.

John of Damascus (675–749), the influential Byzantine theologian, wrote two letters with a didactic profile. John seems to have been aware of the forms and the pedagogical potential of epistolary didacticism, as is indicated by his commentaries on the Pauline epistles.[30] The first letter is an extensive composition addressed to the archimandrite Jordanes about the trisagion hymn, an important part of Byzantine liturgy. There, John analyzed in depth the theological symbolism of the hymn by relying on the authority of selected patristic

27 E.g., *Letters*, no. 1537, ed. and trans. Evieux, vol. 2, p. 223.

28 E.g., *Letters*, no. 1446, ed. and trans. Evieux, vol. 2, p. 77.

29 *Letters*, no. 1640, ed. and trans. Evieux, vol. 2, p. 381.

30 *Commentaries to the Pauline Epistles: Ephesians*, ed. Volk, p. 384, l. 3–4: Τὸ κεφάλαιον τῆς ἐπιστολῆς ἐστιν τὸ διδάξαι αὐτοὺς περὶ τῆς Χριστοῦ χάριτος; *Philippians*, ibid., p. 412, l. 6–7: Ταύτην γράφει τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἀνδράσιν ἐν τῇ κατὰ Χριστὸν διδασκαλίᾳ προκόψασι; *Colossians*, ibid., p. 441, l. 200: διὰ τῆς ἐπιστολιμαίου διδασκαλίας.

authors. He even suggests that the letter may be regarded as a fully-fledged treatise.[31] Yet, despite the extension and depth of the theological learning displayed here, the opening and the ending of the text comply with the epistolary conventions of expressing the sender's affection for the letter's recipient.[32] The didacticism of the letter is unveiled in the opening section when John ascribes the text to the necessity to fight enemies of the church. In addition, the prologue also sets out the method of instruction. John remarks that even if this text was designed as a friendly letter, owing to the far-reaching implications of the topic, it was necessary to use precise concepts.[33]

The other text of interest here is an epistolary dedicatory *prooimion* attached to the first of book of his *Fountain of Knowledge*. The letter offers a preview of the topics discussed in the *Dialectica*: the ancient philosophy, the Christian faith, and the heresies. It also comprises several common epistolary markers such as the author's initial address to Kosmas and the final greetings, where the author stressed that the text was produced at the request of the addressee.[34] John's assumed self-effacement[35] indicates the utility and role of the prefatory letter: it was the letter that offered the necessary space to express himself and to frame his didactic philosophical approach.

Theophylact, Archbishop of Ohrid (1055–1107), compiled an extensive epistolary collection addressed to both high ranking laymen and ecclesiastics.[36] One of the letters included in the collection and addressed to Tibanios, a theologian with different views on Christ's nature,[37] resembles a lecture on the divine and human wills.[38] Given that this text was not conceived as a comprehensive treatise but as a letter, in order to make his point clearer, Theophylact used more vivid comparisons such as the one with the crafting action of fire on iron.[39] There are several passages that underline the text's epistolarity, in particular, the frequent rhetorical questions and the exclamations.[40]

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31 John of Damascus, *Letter on the Trisagion Hymn* 28, ed. Kotter, p. 332, l. 44–45: Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα ἄλλης πραγματείας χρῄζει.

32 Ibid., 1, p. 304, l. 1–15.

33 Ibid., 2, p. 306, l. 1–2: Φαμὲν τοίνυν, ὡς οἱ ὅροι καὶ αἱ κληρώσεις οἱ λόγῳ γινόμενοι πρέποντι βεβαιότατοι τυγχάνουσι.

34 John of Damascus, *Dialectica*, Prologue, ed. Kotter, p. 51, l. 1–4; p. 53, l. 62–63.

35 Ibid., p. 53, l. 60–61: Ἐρῶ δὲ ἐμὸν μέν, ὡς ἔφην, οὐδέν, τὰ δὲ τοῖς ἐγκρίτοις τῶν διδασκάλων πεπονημένα εἰς ἓν συλλεξάμενος.

36 See Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*.

37 For the little information available about Tibanios see the introduction to Theophylact of Ohrid, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Gautier, pp. 129–30.

38 Theophylact of Ohrid, *Letters*, no. 135, ed. and trans. Gautier, pp. 594–97.

39 Ibid., p. 594, l. 8.

40 Ibid., p. 594, l. 6–14.

One further didactic letter penned by Theophylact was addressed to a certain Demetrios and treated sacramental matters specific to the period of Lent: why priests have to be kissed on the shoulder during the liturgy; and why the holy bread is covered during liturgy.[41] The letter offers plenty of details of liturgical practice, while also embracing the epistolary discourse. This becomes clear in the familiar tone one finds, especially at the beginning and the end of the letter.[42]

In the twelfth century Michael Glykas, the imperial *grammatikos*, wrote a series of didactic religious texts,[43] among which many have epistolary features.[44] Yet, not all letters were aimed at simply transmitting information, for Glykas' collection contained other types of letters as well.[45] These missives answered actual requests from the recipients, as is indicated by their epistolary conventions. Recently, Eirini-Sophia Kiapidou indicated that they might have been compiled at a later date into a handbook of popular theology.[46] This is why the author used the term κεφάλαια ("chapters"), thereby suggesting that they were meant to be read as a whole and not individually.

From the Metropolitan of Nicaea and theologian Theophanes (1272–1283) three theological letters labelled as didactic have been preserved: 1. On the true Christ and on how to reject heresies; 2. On patience and long-suffering; and 3. On sanctity.[47] His letters, inspired by the Pauline epistles and homiletic literature, were extensive compositions which did not belong to a self-standing epistolary collection. Like other contemporary pastoral addresses, their topics responded to a major issue faced by late Byzantine communities: the defense of Orthodox beliefs against heresies. They retain few epistolary features, and rather resemble short theological compositions. As a matter of fact, the epistolary frame is only one of the several frames in which these texts were written. Thus, the third letter begins with a brief prefatory passage[48] and only after this preface is an epistolary address introduced.[49]

41 Theophylact of Ohrid, *Orations and Treatises*, no. 8, ed. and trans. Gautier, pp. 334–42.
42 E.g., ibid., p. 341, l. 19.
43 Michael Glykas, *Letters*, ed. Eustratiades. For a recent discussion of the letters see Kiapidou, "On the Epistolography of Michael Glykas"; ead., "Chapters, Epistolary Essays and Epistles". Judging from the extent of the collection, Glykas' network comprised 26 correspondents.
44 Kiapidou, "On the Epistolography of Michael Glykas", p. 178.
45 Michael Glykas, *Letters*, no. 57, ed. Eustratiades, vol. 2, pp. 118–27.
46 Kiapidou, "On the Epistolography of Michael Glykas", p. 181.
47 Theophanes of Nicaea, *Didactic Letters*.
48 Theophanes of Nicaea, *Didactic Letters*, no. 3, in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 155, cols. 320C–321A.
49 Ibid., col. 321A.

In all three letters, the author carefully constructs the didactic approach to topics that needed his former community's attention: pleasure, temptations, fighting the Muslims, the Jews, the Latins, etc. The letters were carefully divided into sections on certain themes that aimed at providing a clearer insight into theological problems.[50] In other cases, Theophanes also gives examples of Biblical figures like Job, definitions of theological concepts, or preliminary remarks. However, these elements and their detailed treatment can hardly be said to constitute distinctive features of epistolary writing. And yet, why does Theophanes frame his texts in epistolary terms when the markers of letter-writing remain scarce?[51] The rationale for this approach is twofold: first, as mentioned, the author followed closely the model of the explanatory Pauline epistles. Second, Theophanes might have sought to establish his authority as a spiritual leader prior to his arrival in Constantinople.[52] On the other hand, even if the kind of teaching transmitted in these texts as well as the audience of the three letters suggest that the author undertook the role of a homilist and theologian, epistolarity remains intimately linked with other features of the text. The often used forms of address, ἀγαπητοί ("beloved ones") and ἀδελφοί ("brothers"), together with the numerous imperatives echo not only a homiletic style but also an epistolary conversation. And while it may seem secondary, epistolarity seems nevertheless to play a key role in the text: it reinforces the connection between the sender and the recipients of the letter, thereby throwing new light on the messages of the text. Thus, it is the epistolary framework and not the homiletic one that shapes Theophanes' profile as a priest-teacher concerned with the difficulties of his community despite the physical distance.[53]

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50 E.g., ibid., col. 321A: Ἀρκτέον δ' ἐντεῦθεν ...; or when he sets the problems ensuing in his text, ibid., col. 336B: Ταῦτα, ἀδελφοί, τὰ ὑπὲρ φύσιν ἀποτελέσματα· ταῦτα, ἀδελφοί, τὰ θεοπρεπῆ καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ἔννοιαν ἔργα τῆς πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἐν σαρκὶ ἐπιδημίας τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἰς τοιαύτην περιοπὴν καὶ δόξαν ἀνείκαστον, τὴν ταπεινὴν ἡμῶν ἀνύψωσε φύσιν ὁ Δεσπότης.

51 For instance the letters' endings include references to the addressees together with prescriptions for ethical conduct as well as brief summaries: e.g., *Didactic Letters*, no. 2, in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 155, 320A: Ὑπομένωμεν τοίνυν, ἀδελφοί, παρακαλῶ· εἰ γάρ, Ὑπομένομεν, φησί, καὶ συμβασιλεύσομεν.

52 On Theophanes biography, see Polemis, *Theophanes of Nicaea*, pp. 25–31.

53 *Didactic Letters*, no. 3, in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 155, col. 349D: Ταῦτα πάντα ποιοῦντες, ἀγαπητοί, καὶ ὑμᾶς αὐτοὺς σώσετε, καὶ τοὺς ἀκούοντας ὑμῶν. Προσεύχεσθε δὲ καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν, ἵνα τὰ καθ' ἡμᾶς εἰς προκοπὴν τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ προέρχηται καθ' ἑκάστην, καὶ ὅπως εὐσταλῶς δι' ὑπομονῆς τρέχωμεν τὸν προκείμενον ἡμῖν ἀγῶνα, ἀφορῶντες εἰς τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν.

At the end of the fourteenth century, Joseph Bryennios, a prolific preacher, authored an extensive letter on the afterlife, addressed to the monks of Crete.[54] This letter was transmitted independently of his letter collection. By shaping this text in epistolary form, Bryennios appears to advertise a strong relationship with the Cretan community, prior to his departure for Constantinople. As in the case of other letters of spiritual didacticism, given the importance of the matter and the plethora of details adduced in his theological teaching, the epistolary indicators are limited to the opening and the end of the text. The text also reflected Bryennios' awareness of the growing Latin influence in the region, an influence which he opposed in multiple other polemical treatises.

Bryennios' text was partially set in the form of a question-and-answer text, for the author rephrases the possible counterarguments of the Cretans and mixes questions and dialogue. The letter commences with the question which had been previously addressed by the letter's recipients.[55] After providing several observations on the Biblical perspective regarding the afterlife, Bryennios dramatizes the educational situation and reproduces an imaginary conversation with the addressees.[56] Bryennios then constructs his answer as a short lecture which underlines the significance of the afterlife in Christian theology. He cites the Old and the New Testaments as sources for the theology of the afterlife.[57] His teaching closely follows John Chrysostom's view on the corruption of matter (φθορά) as well as other exegetical evidence drawn particularly from Gregory of Nazianzos.

3.2 *Technical Didacticism*

In comparison with the expression of spiritual teachings in letters, we have far less evidence in terms of technical didacticism. John Mauropous (1000–*c.*1075), Michael Psellos' teacher, left a collection of 77 letters addressed to different categories of people: friends, scholars, students, courtiers, and emperors. Mauropous' missives came to us in a collection designed by the author himself who, seemingly, left aside many other similar pieces.[58] As he claimed in the

54 Joseph Bryennios, *Letter to the Cretans*, ed. Tomadakes.

55 *Letter to the Cretans*, ed. Tomadakes, p. 136, l. 2–4: ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων μετὰ τὴν δευτέραν τοῦ Χριστοῦ παρουσίαν, πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις αὕτη ἡ ὁρωμένη ἔσται πάλιν ἢ καθάπαξ οἰχήσεται;

56 Ibid., p. 136, l. 14–15: Σοὶ πρὸς ταῦτα δοκεῖ; Μᾶλλον δὲ τίς ἐστιν ἡ ἐν τούτοις ἀλήθεια; Δίδαξόν με μαθεῖν ἐπειγόμενον.

57 Ibid., p. 136, l. 30–36.

58 Karpozilos describes the collection as "carefully selected". The letters, together with other texts, were chosen and gathered by the author himself in codex Vatican City, Biblioteca

πρόγραμμα ("manifesto") that precedes the collection, the aim of this epistolary anthology was to offer just a taste of his writing to his friends, rather than an exhaustive set of his texts.[59] In Letters 17 and 18, addressed to Gregory, a "holy father" inquisitive about philological problems,[60] he used a didactic approach. Mauropous most probably wrote them between 1028 and 1043 during a period when he acted as a teacher and before he enrolled in the court of Constantine IX Monomachos.[61] The two letters bear the marks of Mauropous' vivid style present in other epistles in the collection,[62] a further indication that his intention was to integrate them into his definitive epistolary corpus.

The two letters focus on grammatical and semantic problems. The first one discusses four philological and historical questions: the use of the particle μέν in a sentence from the Old Testament, where Mauropous suggests the presence of an ἀναπόδοτον (a phrase without a main clause); the use of the disjunctive particle ἤ in a hyperbaton; Alcmeon's greediness satirized by Gregory of Nazianzos; and finally Mauropous' use of the form τεσσαρισκαιδέκατον instead of τεσσαρασκαιδέκατον.[63] The other letter deals with the interpretation of Biblical facts: the number of persons present in a passage from the New Testament (Luke 12:52); the confusion between Aviathar and Achimelech in Mark 2:26; and a scribal mistake in Gregory of Nazianzos that seems to create confusion between Joab and Absalom.[64]

In both letters, Mauropous' didacticism pertains to issues which certainly required a shared knowledge of subtle philological and historical problematics. Between Mauropous and Gregory there also seems to be a familiar relationship quite different from the ones reflected in the letters with religious content. The familiarity between the two arises from the fact that while Mauropous knew that Gregory had still a lot to learn from him, he showed irony towards Gregory's insistence to find answers to his questions:

> It seems that he who lives next to a blacksmith must lie awake at night, as the proverb says. But for him who converses with a learned and inquiring man it is quite impossible to become sleepy and sluggish, for his ears are

Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticanus gr. 676. The editor argues that, in selecting the letters, the author sought to avoid excess and superficiality. See the introduction in John Mauropous, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, p. 28.

59 Ibid.

60 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 18, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, p. 81, l. 2–5.

61 See ibid., p. 30.

62 Ibid., p. 12.

63 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 17, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 70–79.

64 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 18, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 80–87.

> buzzed with constant problems and inquires as if by horse-flies … This I know myself from experience with your problems.[65]

As in other cases, the didactic intention of the letters is signaled at the outset of the letters where the questions which the addressee asked originally are restated. The same didactic approach can be found throughout the text in the explanatory passages that seek to solve the problems posed by Gregory. Yet, Mauropous' letters remain unique in the sense that, in addition to the information displayed, they also express concerns vis-à-vis the limitations of epistolarity in teaching. The author reflects on the efficiency of the epistolary medium in transmitting knowledge, comparing it to other genres. In his view, epistolarity is a constraining factor despite the fact that it allows one to address smaller issues in a straightforward and informal manner.[66] At the end of Letter 17 he states: "Because of what you are doing you are not observing the law, as a righteous person, you persuade me to transgress the rules of epistolography by violating them in my letters and by ruining their symmetry with such length."[67] The same attitude concerning the limitations of epistolarity emerges in Letter 18: "What more can one write in a letter? … Yet nothing could be better than having you back with us, as you promised."[68]

The number of quotations from other authorities remains low, for Mauropous is more interested in constructing his argumentation based on his own philological and historical knowledge. Unlike in other cases of didactic letters, although the writer undertakes a straightforward teaching role, in this case he does not legitimize his knowledge by appealing to past authors. Therefore it can be suggested that Mauropous' didactic letters were conceived as parts of a dialogue between the correspondents that was intended to be both friendly and rigorous.

65 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 17, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, p. 71, l. 2–8: Ἦν μὲν ὡς ἔοικεν ἀγρυπνεῖν ἀναγκαῖον τὸν συνοικοῦντα χαλκεῖ κατὰ τὸν δημόσιον λόγον, ἀλλὰ τὸν ἀνδρὶ φιλολόγῳ καὶ ζητητικῷ προσδιαλεγόμενον οὐκ ἔνεστιν ἴσως οὐδὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀπονυστάξαι καὶ ῥᾳθυμῆσαι, τοῖς πυκνοῖς προβλήμασι οἱονεί τισι μύωψι τὰ ὦτα περιβομβούμενον … ὅπερ πάσχοντες ἴσμεν καὶ αὐτοὶ πρὸς τὰ σά.

66 For instance, the divisions into sections present in other religious and the political letters is absent in Mauropous' letters.

67 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 17, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, p. 79, l. 153–55: οἷα γὰρ καὶ ποιεῖς, ὁ μὴ νόμον ἔχων ὡς δίκαιος, παρανομεῖν κἀμὲ πείθεις ἀφειδῶς ἐν τοῖς γράμμασι τοὺς ὅρους τῶν τύπων τῶν ἐπιστολικῶν ὑπερβαίνοντα.

68 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 18, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, p. 86, l. 117–22: τί γὰρ ἂν καὶ μηκύνοι τις ἐν ἐπιστολῇ περαιτέρω; … οὐδὲν μέντοι τοιοῦτον, οἷον αὐτὸν σὲ πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀφιγμένον ὡς ἡ ὑπόσχεσις.

Cardinal Bessarion (1403–1472), a late Byzantine scholar and theologian, wrote a letter on astronomy addressed to George Gemistos Plethon in which he argued that the addressee's astronomical handbook (πρόχειρον) lacked a proper method (μέθοδος) of counting the years. The letter includes straightforward information, while the absence of further stylistic ornaments or addresses, except for the initial one, indicate the correspondents' close connection, attested in other instances as well. Bessarion provides a detailed table with the numbers of years and entreats Plethon to make further research into the issue.[69] The text is also part of an ongoing scientific dialogue between the two scholars, as is indicated by other contemporary evidence.[70]

3.3 *Moral-Political Didacticism*

The area of moral-political didacticism is well represented throughout all of Byzantine history. In the ninth century, Patriarch Photios (810–893) authored a didactic letter addressed to Michael, Prince of Bulgaria, which is included in his epistolary collection.[71] Photios' didacticism pertained to the Byzantine views of kingcraft in the context of Bulgaria's rise as a regional power. To convince his addressee of the advantages of remaining in the Byzantine sphere, Photios included short historical accounts as well as ethico-political teachings. The letter follows closely the structure of a political treatise with a didactic function. The prologue of the letter includes a justification, while the transitions between the major sections are clearly marked: "and now we set up the sacred and the divine teaching of our holy worship."[72] The first section is narrative as it summarizes the history of the Church and the development of Christian doctrine.[73] From the matters of history and doctrine, Photios moves to a discussion of heresies,[74] and a complete list of imperial virtues.[75] Unsurprisingly, in discussing the ruler's virtues, Photios brings into play the instructional material embedded in the popular literature of advice for rulers. Furthermore, unlike the section on ecclesiastical history, the section about the imperial virtues is set in

69 Bessarion, *Letter to Plethon*, eds. and trans. Mercier/Tihon.

70 Further on Byzantine letters with scientific and particularly astronomic content see Riehle, "Epistolographie und Astronomie".

71 Photios, *Letters*, no. 1, eds. Laourdas/Westerink, vol. 1, pp. 2–39.

72 Ibid., p. 3, l. 34–35: νῦν δέ σοι τὸ ἱερὸν καὶ θεόχρηστον τῆς ἱερᾶς ἡμῶν λατρείας ἀνατιθέμεθα μάθημα.

73 Ibid., p. 16, l. 469–70: Αὕτη τῆς πίστεως ἡμῶν τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἡ καθαρὰ καὶ ἀμώμητος ὁμολογία.

74 Ibid., p. 17, l. 497–501.

75 Ibid., p. 21, l. 622–24.

the form of a series of chapters, a strategy that emphasizes the didactic character of the text.

Despite the inclusion of widely accepted political and doctrinal tenets, Photios' letter remains an interesting case of how the epistolary framework is put to work. The author uses few references to past authorities, relying more on his own assessments and on frequent direct addresses.[76] Given the official character of the text, the epistolary markers are used to reinforce the difference of status and role in international politics. Thus, Photios makes this difference clear from the very beginning when he addresses Michael as his/a spiritual son.[77] As in other cases, by using this explicit epistolary frame that suggests symbolic family ties with the addressee, Photios appears to be willing to forge a relationship with his powerful addressee.

As in Photios' case, several letters of Patriarch Nicholas I Mystikos (852–925) display commonly used teachings about rulership in ninth-century Byzantium. Nicholas' collection contains 190 letters dealing with matters of politics and administration. In one of his letters, Nicholas exhorts the Caliph Al-Muqtadir to give up the bellicose intentions towards Byzantium.[78] Nicholas openly assumes a didactic approach that involves the explanation of various types of authority and the singling out of the best such type:

> All earthly authority and rule depend on divine rule and authority; and there is no authority among men, nor any potentate who succeeds to his owner on earth by his native ability … Therefore it is right, if possible, that all of us … should not omit day by day to make contact with one another … This is even more incumbent on those who hold mighty rules and authorities, inasmuch as these have been more signally honored, and are brothers (as it were) superior to and preferred above their brethren.[79]

After the didactic preamble, Nicholas proceeds to explain the political situation of Cyprus and the necessity to maintain peace in the region. Nicholas

76 Ibid., p. 21, l. 629–30: Σὺ δέ μοι μάλιστα πρόσεχε, ἵνα μὴ μόνον ἀκροατής, ἀλλὰ καὶ ποιητὴς γένῃ καλῶν καὶ ἀξιαγάστων πράξεων.

77 Ibid., p. 2, l. 3: περιφανέστατε καὶ ἠγαπημένε ἡμῶν υἱέ. The address with the formula *spiritual son* is also present in the lemma of the letter (ibid., p. 2, l. 1).

78 Nicholas I, *Letters*, no. 1, eds. and trans. Jenkins/Westerink, pp. 4–13.

79 Ibid., pp. 2–3, l. 3–14: Πᾶσα ἐπίγειος ἐξουσία ἐκ τῆς ἄνωθεν ἤρτηται ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐξουσία ἐν ἀνθρώποις, οὐδὲ δυνάστης ἐξ οἰκείας περινοίας ἐπὶ γῆς δυναστείαν κληρονομῶν … Διὰ τοῦτο προσῆκεν, εἰ δυνατόν, πάντας … μὴ διαλιμπάνειν ὅσαι ἡμέραι ποιεῖσθαι τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους κοινωνίαν … τοσοῦτο δὲ πλέον τοὺς τὰς μεγάλας ἀρχὰς καὶ ἐξουσίας διέποντας, ὅσῳ καὶ μᾶλλον διαφερόντως τετίμηνται, καὶ οἷον ἀδελφοί τινες τῶν ἄλλων ἀδελφῶν ὑπερέχοντες καὶ προκριθέντες.

takes the opportunity to lecture the emir on the principles of Mediterranean politics, especially the obligation to respect past agreements. In this case, however, didactic epistolarity is not meant to claim the sender's higher status, as Photios did, but to create the impression of a friendly relationship. That is why Nicholas constantly refers to the emir as to an equal in status and a friend whose official title he acknowledges. This congenial tone is also emphasized by Nicholas' limited recourse to the authority of past writers and the constant efforts to provide sound counsel to his addressee.

Several other letters by Nicholas addressed to the Bulgarian ruler Symeon combine didacticism with elements of moral advice, as Nicholas urges his addressee to accept the traditional Byzantine prerogatives of authority.[80] As in the letter to the emir, Nicholas also inserts didactic passages explaining universal political principles: God has allotted to each nation its boundaries and its rank; those who aspired to more have never been known to prosper for long. We men would not tolerate such behavior in our own subjects.[81] In this short text, however, Nicholas avoids the epistolary conventions and begins abruptly with an explanation of the sources of human authority.

Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos' introductory letter to *De administrando imperio* (*DAI*; completed in 952) constitutes another example of political didacticism.[82] The emperor dedicated this dossier of external diplomacy to his son, Romanos, whom he regarded as a capable successor. As noticed, Constantine conceived the *DAI* as a didactic text and an exposition of information of a secret nature, especially about the ethnic groups in regions neighboring Byzantium.[83] The opening letter was not only a *captatio benevolentiae* but it also aimed at offering an overview of the contents of the *DAI*, which it divides into four major sections: first, a piece of advice on the proper foreign policy; second, on the diplomacy with the peoples in the north; third, an ethnographical survey of the neighboring peoples; and finally, a review of Byzantine internal administration. Unlike other similar authors, Constantine shows awareness of the didacticism involved in the address to his son. The epistolary preface not only briefly presents the goals and the scope of this dossier of foreign policy, but also insists on the didactic nature of the *DAI*.[84] In addition to the biblical references and the ideological tenets usually entertained

80 Nicholas I, *Letters*, no. 9, eds. and trans. Jenkins/Westerink, pp. 52–69.

81 Nicholas I, *Letters*, no. 8, eds. and trans. Jenkins/Westerink, pp. 48–51, l. 63–87.

82 Constantine VII, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins, pp. 44–47.

83 See the introduction, ibid., p. 11.

84 Ibid., pp. 44–45, l. 6–14.

in such texts,[85] Constantine underlines his own contribution to his son's education. He points out that much information came from his own efforts of collecting historical information: "These things have I discovered of my own wisdom and have decreed that they shall be made known unto thee, my son, in order that thou mayest know the difference between these nations, and how either to treat with them."[86]

Under Michael Psellos' name a great many letters have been preserved.[87] A learned scholar and court dignitary, Psellos constantly presented himself as mentor of his students, preoccupied with learning and education. Many of his letters were addressed to his students whom he advised on a variety of matters. However, several letters included a more systematic presentation of information, not just isolated admonitions. Such a case is a letter addressed to Emperor Constantine X Doukas (1006–1067), a response to the ruler's request to describe him a sculpture.[88] The text maintains the epistolary conventions and reflects Psellos' familiarity with the classical world as well as with its various interpretations. In the beginning the sender establishes the contact with the emperor by addressing him and stating the reason for writing the letter.[89] Psellos then proceeds to an *ekphrasis* (description) of the sculpture: he describes the figures, identifies the person holding a sword with Odysseus, and the other sculpted character with Circe, an "obscure image". The description proper of the sculpture inspired by the *Odyssey* conveys a multitude of details such as the setting of the scene, the position of the characters represented in the sculpture, Odysseus' sword and magical plant, or Circe's unusual shape.[90] Psellos' main technique is to introduce strong visual effects: it is as if the author is holding a camera and transmits back the images he captures through the eye of the camera. In addition, to strengthen his interpretation, he includes a passage from the *Odyssey* that echoes the image.

Although much of the letter is an *ekphrasis*, this should not mislead us. The text unveils its didactic meaning in the last passage where Psellos states that the sculpture amounts to a representation of reconciliation between enemies.

85 Elements of Byzantine political thought and ideology are heavily present in the letter: ibid., pp. 46–47, l. 31–48.

86 Ibid., pp. 46–47, l. 24–26: Ταῦτα ἐσοφισάμην κατ᾽ ἐμαυτόν, καὶ εἶπα γνωστά σοι ποιῆσαι, τῷ ἠγαπημένῳ μου υἱῷ, ἵν᾽ ἔχεις εἰδέναι τὴν ἑκάστου τούτων διαφοράν, καὶ πῶς μεταχειρίζεσθαι ταῦτα καὶ οἰκειοῦσθαι ἢ πολεμεῖν καὶ ἀντιτάσσεσθαι.

87 See Chapter 4 in this volume.

88 Michael Psellos, *Orations*, no. 32, ed. Littlewood, pp. 126–27. The text was likely originally a letter and in some manuscripts is preserved as part of Psellos' letter collection; see Papaioannou's introduction to his edition of Psellos' *Letters*, vol. 1, p. xlviii.

89 Michael Psellos, *Orations*, no. 32, ed. Littlewood, p. 126, l. 2–3.

90 Ibid., p. 126, l. 4–7.

This moral-political didactic approach that uses the description of an object coincides with a request addressed to the emperor to show benevolence instead of adversity.[91] The end of the letter thus indicates that the *ekphrasis* and its interpretation represented a mere pretext for teaching a basic tenet of imperial ruling.

The author adopts a didactic approach in other letters as well. Thus a letter addressed to an unknown recipient explains that the cosmic object that seems to be falling from the sky at night was not a real star but a meteorite. Psellos ventures here to explain its elements and how it can fall on the ground.[92] Undoubtedly, in such letters Psellos relies more on reframing ancient knowledge rather than on extensive quotations. While he sometimes refers to past knowledge and classical authors, he submits this knowledge to a personal scrutiny. He avoids presentation of information for its own sake or for conforming its validity but for particular purposes that also seem to involve his self-representation as a teacher.

Manuel II Palaiologos' letter-preface to his *Foundations of an Imperial Education* (Ὑποθῆκαι βαιλικῆς ἀγωγῆς) together with the epistolary epilogue of the so-called *Seven Ethico-political Orations* not only advertise the didacticism of the texts but they are also pedagogical texts with moral and political content.[93] Like his tenth-century predecessor, Constantine VII, Manuel used these epistolary texts to outline the contents of his writings of education in the art of ruling. In addition, these two connected texts further expounded the fundamentals of imperial rule adapted to the needs of the late empire. In the first text, *Foundations of an Imperial Education*, the author emphasizes the paternal care for his son, the future emperor John VIII. In the *Seven Ethico-political Orations*, the epistolary epilogue aims at advertising and re-asserting the central principles of imperial rule to be assimilated by his son: the emperor has the highest authority and this authority comes directly from God without the need for priestly intermediates. Such teaching sharply contrasted the late Byzantine views of a Church which claimed the supremacy of the patriarch in both spiritual and worldly matters.[94]

Albeit attached to two didactic texts, these letters provide the appropriate medium for conveying a message of imperial absolutism contrasting the influence exerted by other contemporary interest groups, especially the

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91 Ibid., p. 127, l. 43–46.

92 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 487, ed. Papaioannou, p. 906.

93 *Foundations of an Imperial Education*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 156, cols. 313–20; *Seven Ethico-political Orations*, ibid., cols. 557–62.

94 See below on Symeon of Thessaloniki.

ecclesiastics. Manuel's method involved less attention to past authority and stressed the role of personal experience. As a matter of fact, the emperor claimed the right to be his son's educator, the one who filtered the knowledge of ancient authors and adapted it to the needs of his time. This role of teacher in political and ethical matters reflected the emperor's attempts to represent himself as διδάσκαλος and rhetor, features that are also reflected by contemporary scholars as well as from other texts of his.[95]

Another late Byzantine ecclesiastical writer, Symeon of Thessaloniki, wrote two didactic texts in epistolary form addressed to Andronikos, Despot of Thessaloniki (1408–1423). The texts were occasioned by Andronikos' donning of the monastic habit in 1423 immediately before Thessaloniki came under Venetian control. The letters combine teachings about monastic life and norms of good rulership in a way that points to Symeon's involvement in the late Palaiologan debates over the emperor's divinely ordained authority. In the first letter, the author limits himself to laying out the main principle guiding the relation between worldly authority and the Church: it is the priestly service (ἱερωσύνη) that renders sacred the imperial rule and this is the reason why a ruler should cooperate with the Church and acknowledge its preeminence.[96] In the second letter, Symeon provides guidelines for Andronikos' initial period of monastic life. Alongside a description of monastic requirements, Symeon combines parenetic and consolatory elements, given that Andronikos' entrance into a monastery was partially determined by the loss of Thessaloniki.[97] Even if the two texts are quite different in terms of content, in both letters Symeon presents his views from the position of a spiritual teacher. The commonly used Biblical or patristic quotations are rather few in comparison to other texts of spiritual instruction but with a more emphatic homiletic approach. Instead, Symeon constantly uses direct address, thereby indicating his connection with the younger Despot. From this perspective, epistolarity becomes crucial in underscoring the writer's self-fashioned profile of a διδάσκαλος which corresponded to his ideological program.

The letter of Patriarch Antony IV addressed to Basil I, Prince of Russia (1395), reiterates the arguments of Byzantine absolutism inscribed in the ninth-century *Epanagoge* ("Introduction to law") at a time when the empire's territory was significantly reduced.[98] The letter underlines common tenets of imperial ideology: the head of the Church resides in Constantinople and the

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95 On the emperor's didactic program see Leonte, *Imperial Visions*.

96 Symeon of Thessaloniki, *Discourses and Letters*, no. B17, ed. Balfour, p. 77.

97 Symeon of Thessaloniki, *Discourses and Letters*, no. B15, ed. Balfour, pp. 78–82.

98 Antony IV, *Letter to Basil I, Prince of Russia*, eds. Miklosich/Müller; trans. (extract) Barker.

Byzantine emperor defends the Church; the Church and empire constitute a great unity; the emperor is the champion and defender of Orthodoxy; and the Bible speaks of one ruler and not of many.

Antony uses frequent epistolary forms of address to emphasize the difference of status between himself and Basil (e.g., the frequent use of the appellation υἱέ μου, "my son"). The didactic-epistolary context seems to force Antony to avoid rebuking the Russian prince's rebellion, despite the fact that Basil clearly broke with the Byzantine claims to authority. Antony's letter thus is limited to laying out a short history and the main principles of imperial rule: from the beginning, the emperor had established Christian piety throughout the empire. The emperors convoked the ecumenical councils, they sanctioned the laws, they fought heresies, and they set the boundaries of the metropolitan sees and episcopal districts. Wherever there are only Christians, the name of the emperor is mentioned by all metropolitans.[99]

Mark Eugenikos, a late Byzantine theologian (1391–1444), composed a letter addressed to Emperor John VIII Palaiologos (r. 1425–1448) on the similarities between the four main kinds of flowers and the four cardinal virtues. Given the addressee's rank, the letter also bears the traces of a panegyric. Eugenikos' letter is presented as a small gift (δῶρον μικρόν).[100] The description of the four flowers (ἴον, ῥόδον, κρίνον, κρόκος: violet, rose, white lily, and saffron) which draws on well-known rhetorical exercises, offers the opportunity to compare the four flowers with the imperial virtues.[101] The letter displays a tendency of teaching with encomiastic means as the author combines didacticism and praise. Eugenikos holds the emperor in high regard, for he addresses him as "greatest emperor" (μέγιστος βασιλεύς) while the text is presented as a gift originating in his rhetorical efforts. Following an ekphrastic model, the author describes these types of flowers from multiple perspectives. First, he lists their qualities corresponding to different natural elements: the violet corresponds to the earth, the rose to the water, the white lily to the air, and the saffron to the fire.[102] Then, Eugenikos notices the perfection of their colors, the harmonious arrangement of the letters in their names, the straightness (ὀρθότης) of their names, and the composition (σύνθεσις) of their perfumes.

The other half of the letter draws a parallel between the four flowers and the four cardinal ethical virtues with which a ruler should be endowed (courage,

99 Antony IV, *Letter to Basil I, Prince of Russia*, eds. Miklosich/Müller, p. 190; trans. Barker, p. 194.

100 Mark Eugenikos, *Letter to John VIII*, ed. Lampros, p. 259, l. 1.

101 Ibid., p. 263, l. 4–12.

102 Ibid., p. 260, l. 5–21.

wisdom, justice, and temperance).[103] Eugenikos emphasizes the divine origin of the natural world's perfection, and quotes extensively from the Psalms. Eventually, in the final address to the emperor, the author connects the necessity to be virtuous in the earthly kingdom so that one could be worthy of the heavenly one.[104]

4 Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Today, didactic literature is back once again and is as attractive as ever. Handbooks and practical guides proliferate in a way that reflects the need for complementary professional publications of many types and designs. To a certain extent this was also the case in the Byzantine world: people needed additional instruction which would help them beyond the training received during the early years of private education that emphasized the acquisition of basic writing and reading skills. As a result, Byzantine didacticism was cast in a multitude of textual forms including less conspicuous ones such as epistolography. Although it emerged in parallel to and was influenced by other types of didacticism, instruction through letters held a distinctive value. In contrast to other genres like historiography, in which a didactic approach had been explicitly embedded since antiquity, epistolography had to solve the conflict between the need to present authoritative and comprehensive information and the necessity to establish close ties between correspondents. For this reason, such letters do not easily lend themselves to a generic analysis unlike other more homogeneous types of letters. Since they had to be adapted to a variety of situations involving different subject areas or audiences, they lacked a set of common rhetorical formal features. If some letters seem to follow the format of the "question-and-answer" literature and provide brief and focused teaching, others are shaped as treatises on a given topic with extensive explanations and examples to help learners. Thus, a major aspect present across all texts explored here was a perceived impulse to convey information in a systematic form.

It is a fact that Byzantine epistolography constituted a protean genre that comprised texts of various topics and lengths from short notes to extensive compositions. Often, the intimacy involved in the epistolary exchange generated substantial advice in spiritual or practical matters. However, such instances cannot be deemed as fully-fledged uses of a didactic design that needs a methodical approach. Rather, I have tried to offer here an overview

103 Ibid., p. 262, l. 15–p. 263, l. 12.
104 Ibid., p. 264, l. 1–24.

and interpretation of extensive didactic letters based on a primary distinction between two categories of didacticism encountered in Byzantium: a "hard" technical didacticism, and a "soft" abstract-conceptual one. This differentiation allowed me to develop a framework in which we can consider in tandem both the functions of the letters as well as the authorial intentions which were not limited to conveying information but also pertained to the promotion of additional messages and representations. This means that many Byzantine authors exploited the epistolary form not only for its power to act as a vehicle of spiritual or moral themes but also because of its ability to encapsulate their own selves.[105]

Although the Byzantines were aware of the flourishing epistolary culture of antiquity, they did not continue the ancient tradition of didactic letters, particularly those with philosophical content. Instead, the tradition of Pauline epistles that combined oratorical and epistolographic elements was far more influential. Furthermore, remarkably, most authors of letters with instructional content had other didactic preoccupations as well, or were themselves regarded as teachers. As learned authors well acquainted with sophisticated rhetorical techniques they used a variety of methods to teach: historical insights (Photios); direct admonitions (Nicholas Mystikos), personal interpretations (John Mauropous), or the authority of past authors or norms.

Although they cannot be said to form a distinct epistolary category, they still share several common traits. First, all authors entertained a straightforward intention to instruct an identifiable addressee who could be either an individual or a group of people. Unlike in the case of other traditional didactic texts, the addressees are never identified with an abstract general readership, that is, any interested person who happens to come across the letter. Second, these letters were written in a dignified and thoughtful style, and even if the subject matter was technical, elements of moral instruction were almost always present. Third, many of these letters tend to simplify the information or the notions they were presenting. Authors cultivate clarity of speech and avoided the trappings of overly complicated explanations. The writing was often paratactic and transitions to correlated issues are included. Fourth, the writer's voice, directly addressing the reader and stating the purpose of the letter, is always visible and sometimes vividly expressed. Even when the letter relies extensively on other sources, the author does not totally recede into the background but makes his presence known in the text. Finally, most letters with instructional content do seem to rely on secondary versions of previous authoritative texts that already comprised the information transmitted. However, there are few authors who

105 See also Chapter 12 in this volume.

emphasize that their kind of instruction was original and distinct from previous teachings.

Still, didacticism in letters cannot be narrowed down to a single well-defined pattern of thought or form which suffers slight variations across different time periods. Just as we cannot speak about a unified didactic genre, in the same manner we cannot speak about a single type of didactic letters. Instead, the variety of topics approached in these letters lead us to the idea of Byzantine epistolary didacticism as a multifaceted rhetorical mode. The texts discussed here suggest the existence of three main categories of didacticism: spiritual, political, and technical. The moral and spiritual education predominated as these categories reflected the concrete needs of the addressees: fighting the Christian heresies, preventing foreign rulers from causing trouble to the Byzantine Empire, or adopting an individual appropriate conduct. Likewise, the didactic-diplomatic letters addressed to foreign rulers were meant to reframe ideas of Byzantine ideology in an international context.

Eventually, a discussion of didacticism in Byzantine epistolography needs to answer the question as to whether epistolarity was a mere ornamental feature or rather a major discourse organizer which highlighted aspects otherwise difficult to render with common didactic ploys. The discussion above indicates that, in most examples, the latter variant was true. Thus, most letters maintained the style or at least several core elements of a real conversation which, in turn, made the communication of information more flexible and created a more intimate connection between teachers and students within an educational setting. Letters mitigate the effects of physical distance or social difference as, for instance, when a spiritual leader addressed the members of his community. Epistolarity had another function as well: by creating stronger ties between correspondents it generated a community of knowledge in which the missive was supposed to mediate not only between two individuals but also between past knowledge and present situations. Thus it enforced the impression of continuity and of a common purpose for both the sender and the addressee.

In today's scholarship, the didactic literature of Byzantium in general, and the epistolary didacticism in particular, has received little attention. The overview offered in this chapter certainly cannot replace an exhaustive study of the topic, yet it has attempted to provide a possible roadmap for further research of authors and aspects of epistolary didacticism. This study has unveiled the changing forms of didactic letters as well as the epistolographers' constant dialogue with other literary genres and traditions. The resilience of epistolary didacticism throughout Byzantine literary history also suggests that letters were perceived as an efficient means of communicating knowledge. Further investigation of the letters with didactic content and their reception would be

interesting not only to document the avatars of a Byzantine literary form but also to shed more light on education in Byzantium.

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CHAPTER 9

Epistolography and Philosophy

Divna Manolova

1 Introduction

Byzantine philosophical literature presents many challenges to its modern students. One major obstacle is the fact that, of the relevant sources, a large number are still unedited, and as a result are understudied, and lack a translation to the modern scholarly languages, which makes them less accessible. Significant progress has been made, however, since the publication of Tatakis' seminal monograph *Byzantine Philosophy* in 1949, both in terms of editing texts and of the latter's examination. Thus, we now have a better idea of the subject matters approached by philosophers in Byzantium, and the discipline-specific methods they employed, as well as how philosophical material was taught and studied;[1] finally, we have a sense of who the philosophers were.[2] In addition, scholars have started paying attention to the genres preferred by the Byzantines for the education and practice of philosophy, such as the philosophical essay[3] and dialogue,[4] or the philosophical commentary and paraphrase.[5] Genre studies, however, as Agapitos has observed, still lack proper treatment by Byzantinists beyond the mere collecting and classification of material *sub specie antiquitatis*.[6] Thus, it should not be surprising that a study

1 See, for instance, Cacouros, "La philosophie et les sciences"; Bydén, *Theodore Metochites'* Stoicheiosis Astronomike; Trizio, "Reading and Commenting on Aristotle"; Mariev, *Byzantine Perspectives on Neoplatonism*; and, more recently, the various contributions in Bydén/Radovic, *The Parva Naturalia*.

2 The most recent comprehensive survey of philosophy in Byzantium is Brungs/Kapriev/Mudroch, *Die Philosophie des Mittelalters*.

3 Bydén, "The Nature and Purpose of the *Semeioseis gnomikai*".

4 Mariev, "Παιδεία und ἀστειότης"; Cameron, *Dialoguing in Late Antiquity*; Karamanolis, "Form and Content".

5 Ierodiakonou, "The Byzantine Commentator's Task"; Golitses, "Un commentaire perpétuel"; Barber/Jenkins, *Medieval Greek Commentaries*; van den Berg/Manolova/Marciniak, *Preserving, Commenting, Adapting*.

6 Agapitos, "Ancient Models and Novel Mixtures", pp. 7–8. On the avoidance of application of literary and cultural theory in Byzantine studies, see Agapitos, "Contesting Conceptual Boundaries", p. 6. I am grateful to the author for sharing his text with me before publication. For very helpful observations concerning the "cross-fertilization" between genres and the

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of the interaction between philosophy and epistolography, and a critical assessment of the usefulness of the analytic category of *philosophical letter* in Byzantium, are yet to be written.

The study of Byzantine philosophical epistolography is further hindered by the methodological challenges the material presents.[7] Notably, the most common definition of the philosophical letter, namely as a philosophical essay in epistolary form, leads to two consequences which gain particular importance when applied to the Byzantine material. While what is meant by 'epistolary form' appears to be clearer,[8] the endorsement of what we may call an *essentialist* definition such as this one requires further clarification as to what is meant by *philosophical*. In other words, in order to identify which Byzantine letters are philosophical essays in epistolary form, one ought to define the subject matters which the Byzantines recognized as philosophical.

2 Methodological Challenges: the Limitations of an Essentialist Approach

Recent scholarship has made significant effort in circumscribing the discipline-specific subject matter and methods with which Byzantine philosophical thought was concerned. To this aim, scholars have focused on two main tasks, namely, first, to demarcate the so-called autonomy of Byzantine philosophical thought with respect to its theological counterpart[9] and, in relation to that, to scrutinize the relationship between Byzantine philosophy and its ancient Greek precursor; and second, to understand Byzantine philosophy in its own terms, that is, according to its internal criteria for what philosophy is.[10] Thus, it has been argued that the "inextricable continuity with ancient philosophy … chiefly justifies treating Byzantine philosophical discourse as philosophical"[11]

impracticability of trying to establish "a comprehensive family tree of all genres and types of writing", see Shanzer, "Interpreting the Consolation", p. 234.

7 On the essentialist approach to studying Byzantine philosophy and the need for a new methodological take on the subject, see Trizio, "Byzantine Philosophy as a Contemporary Historiographical Project", pp. 250, 257.

8 See, for instance, Kiapidou, "Chapters, Epistolary Essays and Epistles".

9 For summary of the scholarly discussion, see the introductions to Ierodiakonou, *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources* and Ierodiakonou/Bydén, *The Many Faces of Byzantine Philosophy*. For a critical assessment of modern scholarship of Byzantine philosophy, see Ivanović, "Byzantine Philosophy and Its Historiography" and Trizio, "Byzantine Philosophy as a Contemporary Historiographical Project".

10 Ierodiakonou/Zografides, "Early Byzantine Philosophy", p. 844.

11 Ierodiakonou, "Byzantine Philosophy Revisited", p. 7.

and that "the interaction between Byzantine and ancient philosophy is at the heart of the problem concerning the philosophical status of the works of Byzantine thinkers".[12] Notably, Benakis related the autonomy of Byzantine philosophical thought to its preoccupation with the production of commentaries to ancient philosophical works and with engaging in a sometimes polemical dialogue with ancient philosophical doctrines.[13]

As a result, a number of philosophical problems have been listed in overviews of Byzantine philosophical literature,[14] for instance, discussions of logical fallacies, homonymy and synonymy; inquiries after matter, space and time, and cosmological questions concerning the creation of the perceptible world and its constitution; the relationship between body and soul; knowledge of first principles, possibilities of knowledge, and skepticism; the existence of God and the ontological status of the universals; questions pertaining to free will, necessity; and finally, the nature of good and evil, virtue and responsibility, and the possibility of a just state.[15] In sum, Byzantine philosophical literature addressed a wide range of problems from the spheres of logic, ethics, and politics, physics and natural philosophy, cosmology and metaphysics.[16] Thus, an *essentialist* approach to the study of philosophical epistolography in Byzantium examines letters whose topic is recognized as philosophical, and interprets their epistolary form as a vehicle for transmitting the authors' knowledge and ideas, for instance, by answering questions posed by the correspondent or by giving advice. Therefore, philosophical letters, as far as their epistolary functions are concerned, perform as didactic, hortatory, and advice

12 Ibid., p. 11.

13 Benakes, "Epilogue: Current Research in Byzantine Philosophy", p. 287.

14 Ierodiakonou, *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources*, p. 2; Bydén/Ierodiakonou, "Greek Philosophy", pp. 14–17; Ierodiakonou, "Byzantium", p. 41; Ierodiakonou/Zografides, "Early Byzantine Philosophy".

15 On the definitional problem with regard to Byzantine philosophy and the widespread medieval Greek understanding of philosophy as ascetic monastic life and contemplation of death, a topic omitted from the list above, see Trizio, "Byzantine Philosophy as a Contemporary Historiographical Project", pp. 251–52.

16 For comprehensive studies of Byzantine philosophy, see Tatakes, *La philosophie byzantine*; Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz*; Kapriev, *Philosophie in Byzanz*; Brungs/Kapriev/Mudroch, *Die Philosophie des Mittelalters*. Very useful collective volumes outlining current research in Byzantine philosophy are Ierodiakonou, *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources*; Cacouros/Congourdeau, *Philosophie et sciences à Byzance*; and Ierodiakonou/Bydén, *The Many Faces of Byzantine Philosophy*. For a very recent and provocative assessment of the philosophical thought of the Byzantines which argues that "[t]he Byzantines did not philosophize as such, yet they did further philosophical activity in an idiosyncratic way", see Gutas/Siniossoglou, "Philosophy and 'Byzantine Philosophy'".

literature.[17] The philosophical collection preserved in Oxford, The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Barocci 131, for instance, as well as a number of Michael Psellos' (1018–78) opuscula, preserve the form of replies, drafted as letters, to questions posed by the correspondent.[18]

The application of an essentialist approach to Byzantine epistolography renders limited results. Consequently, the expression of Byzantine philosophical thought in letter-writing has been deemed "incidental"[19] and "occasional".[20] Among the letters discussed as philosophical within an essentialist framework[21] are, for instance, Michael Psellos' lengthy letter to John Xiphilinos[22] and Theodore Prodromos' short essay *On Great and Small*.[23] Similarly to Prodromos' anti-Aristotelian epistolary discussion in defense of the view that great and small should be viewed as quantities rather than relatives, another Psellian letter also treated a logical problem as its subject matter,[24] namely, the problem of homonymy and synonymy.[25] Another example is Barlaam of Calabria's so-called *First Greek Letter*, which raises the issue of applying demonstrative argumentation with respect to the divine.[26]

In sum, within an essentialist approach to philosophy and philosophical epistolography in Byzantium, the analytic category of *philosophical letter*

17 Hunger, for instance, classified the philosophical letter within the category of didactic letters. Further, he illustrated one of the didactic letter types, namely the so-called epistolary lesson (*Lehrbrief*) by adducing the example of Nikephoros Gregoras' Letter 69: Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 203–07. Another case in point is Gregoras' Letter 42 which I discuss on pp. 265–67 of the present chapter.

18 O'Meara, "The Justinianic Dialogue *On Political Science*"; also, more recently, Bernard, "Educational Networks", p. 38: "The roles of Psellos the teacher and Psellos the writer of letters often merge into one; letters were used as a medium for teaching, and the transmission of knowledge pervaded his personal letters." For the most recent and complete critical edition of Psellos' letters, see Michael Psellos, *Letters*, ed. Papaioannou. In the prolegomena the editor reflects on generic ambiguities such as the difficulty of distinguishing a letter from a speech/discourse, as well as on the difference between what he calls the "manuscript definition" of a letter and the "formal/functional definition" (vol. 1, pp. xliv–li).

19 Ierodiakonou/Zografides, "Early Byzantine Philosophy", pp. 850–51.

20 Ierodiakonou/Bydén, "Byzantine Philosophy".

21 Ibid.

22 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 202, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 527–44.

23 Theodore Prodromos, *On Great and Small*, ed. Tannery.

24 Ierodiakonou, "Byzantine Logic", p. 695; Bydén/Ierodiakonou, "Greek Philosophy", pp. 14–17.

25 Michael Psellos, *Opuscula*, no. 6, ed. Duffy.

26 Barlaam of Calabria, *Greek Letters*, ed. Schirò; *Letters to Palamas*, ed. Fyrigos. For a summary of Barlaam's *First Greek Letter*, see Ierodiakonou/Bydén, "Byzantine Philosophy".

obscures the possibility of a *dynamic* understanding of the *philosophical*.[27] It prevents, moreover, an inquiry into the ways in which authorial representation and the creation of meaning benefit from rendering a philosophical idea in a letter.[28] In other words, letters in this case "can be mined for nuggets of philosophical speculation"[29] while disregarding any influence of their epistolary features on the philosophical ideas and inquiries included in them.

3 Methodological Challenges: Questions of Mimesis

The second consequence of the endorsement of an essentialist definition of the philosophical letter is related to the much-discussed mimetic and emulative features of Byzantine literature.[30] The latter entails that in their effort to compose a philosophical letter Byzantine authors would follow an authoritative example of philosophical epistolography. The genre of the philosophical letter as a phenomenon started at the latest with Epicurus and flourished during the early imperial period, and especially during the fourth century. Thus,

27 Exceptional in this respect is Trizio's view of the philosophical tradition in Byzantium as rich, varied, and of "non-essential character". Further, he argues in favor of discussing "Byzantine philosophies" rather than identifying the essence of Byzantine philosophy: "Once again, in my opinion, the aim should not be to provide at all costs an image of Byzantine philosophy as a whole, but to point out the different Byzantine philosoph*ies*, the different social practices and the different manifestations of the term 'philosophy' in Byzantium." (Trizio, "Byzantine Philosophy as a Contemporary Historiographical Project", pp. 247, 286). For Ierodiakonou's criticism of Trizio's position, see Ierodiakonou, "Byzantine Philosophy Revisited", p. 10.

28 The essentialist approach to Byzantine philosophical epistolography is not interested in the reasons behind the choice of the epistolary genre for the transmission of philosophical ideas. Thus, Byzantine philosophical letters have not been approached in a way similar to Brad Inwood's exemplary take on Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius*. See Seneca, *Philosophical Letters*, trans. Inwood, p. xii; Inwood, "The Importance of Form". For my analysis of Gregoras' motivation for rendering philosophical ideas in his letters, see Manolova, "Discourses of Science and Philosophy".

29 Marrone, "Medieval Philosophy in Context", p. 48. The essentialist approach towards letter-writing of historians of Byzantine thought is comparable to the historical "fact-seeking" approach to epistolography discussed by Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", p. 222: "In this sort of treatment, historians largely ignore the philological and formal complexities of epistolography, aiming instead to harvest scattered bits of information that are ostensibly unaffected and unobscured by the peculiarities of the source material."

30 Hunger, "On the Imitation (ΜΙΜΗΣΙΣ) of Antiquity"; Melberg, *Theories of Mimesis*; Papaioannou, "Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and the Self", p. 80; Rhoby/Schiffer, *Imitatio, aemulatio, variatio*.

based on the early Greek philosophical epistolography, Dillon and Polleichtner define the philosophical letter as a genre as

> … a short philosophical (usually moral) essay, given a lively and personalized slant by being addressed to a particular recipient, usually a friend or student of the author, but sometimes a patron or other public figure. The subject matter of the epistle should doubtless be tailored to some extent to the position or role in life of the recipient …, but this need not necessarily be so, if the letter concerns a very general moral topic, such as justice or self-control.[31]

Correspondingly, since letter-writing in Byzantium continued and developed the classical tradition of appropriation of the epistolary form for the purposes of transmission of, instruction in, and practice of philosophy,[32] it follows that Byzantine philosophical letters were also concerned with providing knowledge and guidance concerning philosophical problems. However, one does not find Plato's and Aristotle's pseudepigraphic letters as models for philosophical epistolography. As a noteworthy passage from Photios' Letter 207 addressed to Amphilochios, metropolitan of Kyzikos, demonstrates, such texts were appreciated examples of style and eloquence but not necessarily of treatment of philosophical topics:

> While some of Plato's dialogues are by nature guides to the theory of government, …, his epistles are bequeathed to posterity as a fair measure of his eloquence and of the epistolary form. Those, however, of Aristotle, indeed, are somewhat more endowed with the command of language than, of course, his other writings, but they are not equal to those of Plato. Whereas the other works of Demosthenes fill with praises the mouths of both orators and literary critics, you will find his epistles not at all better than those of Plato.[33]

31 Iamblichus of Chalcis, *Letters*, trans. Dillon/Polleichtner, p. xvii.

32 Littlewood, "An 'Ikon of the Soul'", pp. 197–98.

33 Photios, *Letters*, trans. White, p. 178; Photios, *Letters*, no. 207, eds. Laourdas/Westerink, pp. 106–07, l. 1–9: Οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι τοῦ Πλάτωνος λόγοι τοῦ πολιτικοῦ λόγου πεφύκασι γνώμονες, … αἱ δὲ τούτου ἐπιστολαὶ ἴσον τε τῆς ἐκείνου λογιότητος καὶ τοῦ ἐπιστολιμαίου τύπου ἀπολείπονται. αἱ δέ γε τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους τῶν μὲν ἄλλων αὐτοῦ γραμμάτων εἰσί πως λογοειδέστεραι, πλὴν οὐδὲ ταῖς Πλατωνικαῖς ἐξισάζουσι. Δημοσθένους δὲ οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι πόνοι καὶ ῥητόρων καὶ κριτικῶν ἐγκωμίοις πληροῦσι τὰ στόματα, τὰς ἐπιστολὰς δὲ οὐδὲν ἀμείνους εὑρήσεις τῶν Πλάτωνος. Compare with the criticism of the Platonic letters and of the inclusion of technical philosophical material in letter-writing in Pseudo-Demetrios, *On Style*, ed. Roberts, pp. 174, l. 14–p. 176, l. 4.

The proliferation of philosophical letter-writing in Greek in the fourth century, however, offered another set of authoritative models Byzantine epistolographers could follow, such as the letters of Libanios, Synesios, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory of Nazianzos. Importantly, as Papaioannou demonstrated, by the eleventh century Gregory of Nazianzos "had become the exemplary author for Byzantine readers"[34] and while until the middle of the tenth century he was read primarily as "a source of philosophical meaning"[35] and as a theological authority, during the course of the century, Gregory's rhetoric increasingly gained importance for his commentators.[36] The tenth-century rhetorical reading of Gregory influenced Michael Psellos' thought and contributed to the latter's purposeful reconfiguration of the status of rhetoric from "preparatory, supplementary, or just superfluous" to "central to the philosopher's social persona".[37] According to Papaioannou, in Psellos' writings "[f]or the first time in the history of the philosophico-rhetorical debate, the combination of philosophy with rhetoric is imagined as the ideal philosopher's unified and single discursive practice".[38] Moreover, Papaioannou demonstrated that by the second half of the twelfth century "Psellos' insistence on the mixture of philosophy with rhetoric became a topos" for those Byzantines engaged in the study and practice of philosophy.[39] Indeed, for instance, in the twelfth century Michael Italikos (*c.*1090?–before 1157) leveled a number of accusations against philosophy as detached and unconcerned with human affairs, as opposed to rhetoric which preoccupied itself with the affairs of justice, government, and administration, and in its effort to seek what is useful to mankind, it demonstrated its superiority over philosophy.[40]

Thus, the eleventh-century shift in the dialectic of rhetoric and philosophy with regard to the philosopher's social persona coupled with the centrality

34 Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship*, p. 56.

35 Ibid., p. 59.

36 Ibid., pp. 60–63.

37 Papaioannou, "Rhetoric and the Philosopher in Byzantium", p. 187.

38 Ibid., p. 183. Interestingly, in the eleventh century a comparable reconfiguration concerning the relationship between truth and the literary enterprise (philosophy and rhetoric in the Western/European case) was carried out in China within the philosophical project of Su Shi (1037–1101); see Virág, "Bridging the Divide".

39 Papaioannou, "Rhetoric and the Philosopher in Byzantium", p. 191.

40 Michael Italikos, *Letters*, no. 13, ed. Gautier, pp. 139–40. In his Letter 5 addressed to the *despoina kyra* Irene Doukaina, Italikos specified that though philosophy concerns itself with the heavenly matters such as mathematics, music, and astronomy and, correspondingly, it is criticized for its uselessness, the philosopher is nevertheless able to descend from contemplation and to engage with issues such as administration and governance. See Michael Italikos, *Letters*, no. 5, ed. Gautier, pp. 93–98.

of rhetoric for Byzantine epistolography ought to be taken in consideration when analyzing the letters of contemporary philosophers, especially from the perspective of epistolographic functions of self-fashioning, authorial representation, and ethos portrayal.[41] Correspondingly, one might inquire whether and how the emphasis on the importance of mixing rhetoric and philosophy, inherent to the Byzantine intellectual discourse after the eleventh century, according to Papaioannou, shaped Byzantine conceptions of philosophical epistolography in terms of the rhetorization of the philosophical subject matter[42] and philosophization of the epistolary discourse.[43] By extension, the changing self-fashioning strategies of those who wished to appear as philosophers through their letters ought to be examined.

Another significant consequence of the essentialist approach's disinterest in the creation of the philosopher's discursive persona consists of the dismissal of letter-collections as coherent units of meaning constructed so as to portray their authors' philosophical ethos and to pursue their respective agenda *qua* philosophers. Similarly to the character delineation achieved by a single letter,[44] a letter-collection construed an authorial representation as, for instance, Theodore Hyrtakenos' selection of letters for his epistolary collection consciously portrayed him as an impoverished teacher;[45] John Mauropous' and Nikephoros Choumnos' letter-collections were purposefully constructed so as to serve as a sort of autobiography;[46] while Theodore II Laskaris'

41 On the various social and literary functions of letter-writing, see Karpozilos, "The Correspondence of Theodoros Hyrtakenos"; Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*; Tinnefeld, "Zur Entstehung von Briefsammlungen"; id., *Die Briefe des Demetrios Kydones*; Riehle, *Funktionen der byzantinischen Epistolographie*; Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*; Grünbart, "'Tis Love That Has Warm'd Us".

42 Amato and Ramelli note rhetoric's "letteraturizzazione e pervasività" which, according to them, is present in the philosophical production ever since the imperial period, a phenomenon they see represented in Byzantine philosophical literature and in Nikephoros Choumnos' works in particular. See Amato/Ramelli, "Filosofia *rhetoricans*", esp. pp. 12–15. Ierodiakonou and Zografides also point out that "we still have to investigate the intimate relations in Byzantine culture between philosophy, theology and rhetoric". Ierodiakonou/Zografides, "Early Byzantine Philosophy", p. 846. On the philosophization of rhetorical practice by John Sikeliotes (late tenth/early eleventh centuries), see Papaioannou, "Sicily, Constantinople, Miletos", p. 276.

43 See, for instance, Papaioannou's discussion of the so-called "ontology of sameness" as a theoretical and philosophical model for the epistolary discussions concerning the nature of friendship. Papaioannou, "Gregory and the Constraint of Sameness", p. 59.

44 Littlewood, "An 'Ikon of the Soul'", p. 216.

45 Karpozilos, "The Correspondence of Theodore Hyrtakenos".

46 John Mauropous, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, p. 31; Riehle, "Epistolography as Autobiography".

letters fashioned him as a philosopher-king.[47] Importantly, from the eleventh century onwards, as the writings of Michael Psellos[48] and Michael Italikos[49] demonstrate, love for learning (*philomatheia*) and erudition (*polymatheia*) were conceived as characteristic features of the philosopher.[50] The same idea persisted in the Palaiologan period.[51] For instance, in his *Commentary on Synesios'* On Dreams,[52] *First Solution to a Philosophical Problem*[53] and in his Platonizing dialogue *Philomathes*,[54] Nikephoros Gregoras conceived the love for learning as a characteristic feature of the inquiring, i.e., philosophical mind. Correspondingly, Gregoras' letter-collection includes, in addition to letters of recommendation, request, friendship, and letters accompanying the exchange of treatises and gifts, a number of missives treating theological (Letter 3), philosophical (Letters 12, 34, 42, 46, 134), mathematical (Letter 6), and astronomical (Letters 28, 40, 53, 69, 103, 114, 140, 148) subjects. Not only did the collection comprise letters engaged with varied knowledge, but also, as the arrangement of the main manuscript witnesses sanctioned through Gregoras' autograph corrections – Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, codd. Vat. gr. 1085, 1086, 116, and 1898 – demonstrates, groups of letters were put together with rhetorical exercises, orations, hagiographical literature, Platonizing dialogues, and poetry, thus creating a collected œuvre, marked by its author's

47 On Theodore II Laskaris' philosophical thought, see most recently Angelov, *The Byzantine Hellene*, pp. 181–201. The importance of the study of letter-collections as such was noted already by Sykutris, "Epistolographie".

48 Duffy, "Hellenic Philosophy in Byzantium", pp. 149–50, n. 38.

49 Duffy, "Reactions of Two Byzantine Intellectuals", p. 91. See also Michael Italikos, *Letters*, no. 30, ed. Gautier, p. 198, l. 6–7 and no. 31, ibid., p. 202, l. 2–10.

50 Benakes, *Byzantine Philosophy*, p. 160; Ierodiakonou, *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources*, p. 4; Trizio, "Byzantine Philosophy as a Contemporary Historiographical Project", p. 255.

51 Cf. Pérez Martín, "The Transmission of Some Writings by Psellos", p. 174.

52 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Commentary of Synesios'* On Dreams, ed. Pietrosanti, pp. 123–129. The prefatory letter to Gregoras' *Commentary on Synesios'* On Dreams is an example of another possible venue towards the study of philosophical epistolography in Byzantium. Prefatory letters to philosophical works such as Gregoras' *Protheoria* sometimes addressed the method the author-commentator employed, as well as the issues the main work was concerned with. Notably, a prefatory letter sometimes enjoyed an independent transmission as in the case of Gregoras' *Protheoria* or *Hortatory Letter Concerning Astronomy*. See Nikephoros Gregoras, *Commentary of Synesios'* On Dreams, ed. Pietrosanti, p. 130 and n. 5 and Manolova, "'If It Looks like a Letter'".

53 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Antilogia and Solutions to Philosophical Problems*, ed. Leone, pp. 488–89, l. 1–22.

54 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Philomathes, or, On Arrogant People*, ed. Leone. For my discussion of the *Philomathes* and of the idea of love for learning and polymathy in Gregoras, see Manolova, "Nikephoros Gregoras's *Philomathes* and *Phlorentios*".

philomatheia and *polymatheia*, and consequently, portraying him as a philosopher and master of all disciplines.

4 Letter-Writing as Friendship Literature: the Case of Nikephoros Gregoras' Correspondence

In 1996, Hatlie observed that despite the seminal contributions by Mullett,[55] Tinnefeld,[56] and Ljubarskij,[57] "some very basic epistolographic concerns, such as friendship, still await the attention of historians".[58] While subsequent contributions in Byzantine epistolography significantly advanced our understanding of friendship letters and their role both in establishing and maintaining patronage and friendship networks[59] and for authorial representation and intellectual exchange,[60] much remains to be said concerning theories of friendship in Byzantium and, by extension, concerning friendship literature and epistolography in particular.[61] Notable exceptions include Karlsson's focus on the instrumentality of epistolography in creating the presence of the correspondent-friend and in facilitating the union of the friends' souls,[62] and Papaioannou's and Bernard's studies of eleventh-century epistolography.[63]

One possible venue for approaching the relationship between friendship theory, epistolography, and moral and political philosophy would be to

55 Mullett, "Byzantium: A Friendly Society?"; ead., "Friendship in Byzantium".

56 Tinnefeld, "'Freundschaft' in den Briefen des Michael Psellos".

57 Ljubarskij, *Michail Psell*, pp. 117–22 (*Η προσωπικότητα*, pp. 178–83).

58 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", p. 247.

59 Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*; Grünbart, *Geschenke erhalten die Freundschaft*; id., "Paideia Connects"; Hartmann, "Eloquence and Friendship".

60 Kotzabassi, "Scholarly Friendship"; Bernard, "'Greet Me with Words'"; Riehle, "Rhetorik, Ritual und Repräsentation"; id., "Epistolography, Social Exchange and Intellectual Discourse". I am grateful to the author for sharing his text with me before publication.

61 See Chapter 10 in this volume. For comparative approaches to Latin medieval friendship literature, see, for instance, Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*; Ziolkowski, "Twelfth-Century Understandings and Adaptations of Ancient Friendship", esp. pp. 65, 70, 78–80; Haseldine, *Friendship in Medieval Europe*; Ysebaert, "Medieval Letter-Collections". On the role of the letter and its discourse on friendship for the purposes of philosophical and moral instruction and learning in the letters of Epicurus and Seneca, see Lozano Vásquez, *Cartas filosóficas*.

62 Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial*, p. 57 and esp. pp. 21–23 and 57–67: "Une lutte pour obtenir la présence et l'union, indépendamment de la distance – c'est ainsi, finalement, qu'on pourrait définir l'acte d'écrire une lettre."

63 See, for instance, Papaioannou, "Language Games"; Bernard, "'Greet Me with Words'"; and Chapter 4 in this volume.

appropriate Schramm's approach,[64] namely, to treat friendship as a central concept of political philosophy and to apply, in the manner of Konstan,[65] a sociological perspective on Byzantine friendship. In addition, when examining Byzantine epistolography one ought to address what Garver deemed "the rhetorical nature of commitment", namely, the discursive expressions of the ability to be a friend, to talk about friendship and to justify one's friendship.[66] Finally, what begs further examination by historians of Byzantine philosophy and literature is the integration of theories of friendship, for instance, Aristotle's views as expounded in *Nicomachean Ethics*, and letter-writing. The letters of Nikephoros Gregoras, for instance, are particularly interesting in this respect as they problematize and even occasionally subvert established premises of Byzantine epistolography inherited from Aristotle's doctrine.[67]

Nikephoros Gregoras (d. *c.*1360)[68] is chiefly known for his historiographical account of the events taking place in Byzantium during the period between 1204 and *c.*1359, namely, his *Roman History*, as well as for his expertise in Ptolemaic astronomy, and more recently, as one of the most prolific Palaiologan hagiographers. His philosophical knowledge and epistemological stance have also been the subject of scholarly discussion.[69] In addition, he was a prolific letter-writer and, though understudied, his correspondence reflects both his active engagement in a number of contemporary debates (e.g., regarding the status of astronomy or the so-called Hesychast controversy) and philosophical expertise. Letter 42 is one of Gregoras' very few didactic letters as it delivers an explanation of a philosophical problem and, thus, fits the essentialist criteria for a philosophical letter. The missive was addressed to Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina (1333–96)[70] as an answer to her question concerning the difference between chance (*tyche*) and spontaneity (*to automaton*). After praising

64 Schramm, *Freundschaft im Neuplatonismus*.

65 Konstan, "Philosophy, Friendship, and Cultural History".

66 Garver, "The Rhetoric of Friendship", p. 127.

67 See for instance Riehle's commentary on Gregoras' Letter 91 in Riehle, "Epistolography, Social Exchange and Intellectual Discourse".

68 Trapp et al., *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit* (hereafter: *PLP*), no. 4443. For a comprehensive, though outdated, account of Gregoras' life, see Guilland, *Essai sur Nicéphore Grégoras*. One of the most useful biographical accounts, however, a catalogue and a concise description of Gregoras' works are found in Nikephoros Gregoras, *Roman History*, trans. van Dieten, pp. 1–62. For an updated bibliography on Gregoras, see Dunaev, "Nicephorus Gregoras", pp. 369–76.

69 On Gregoras' epistemological skepticism, see Demetracopoulos, "Nikephoros Gregoras"; id., "Christian Scepticism", esp. pp. 358–61; Bydén, "'To Every Argument There Is a Counter-Argument'".

70 *PLP*, no. 21365.

Helena's inquisitive mind and intellectual achievements, Gregoras first analyzed two types of intellectual processes of acquiring knowledge. His objective was to establish a hierarchy of objects of knowledge and of the corresponding methods of approaching them. Thus, he noted that while physical objects, that is, the perceptibles, exist prior to perception, they are less worthy than the imperceptible objects of the intellect. Both the perception and the intellect approach their respective objects in a manner befitting their nature and both methods are valid paths to acquiring knowledge. Scientific knowledge, in Gregoras' opinion, could ascend from examinations of the particulars and could descend from intelligibles such as the universals.

The second part of Letter 42 addresses the question of defining the difference between chance and spontaneity.[71] Following Aristotle in his differentiation between chance and spontaneity based on whether they involve choice (*proairesis*) and thought (*dianoia*)[72] and, subsequently, pertain to rational or irrational beings,[73] Gregoras argued that

> chance [*tyche*] and spontaneity [*automaton*] are not the same. For on the one hand, spontaneity could result from chance, but the opposite, on the other, would not be possible. For chance is perceived, for the most part, as coexisting with those who possess a guiding choice.[74]

Notably, Aristotle also specified that spontaneity is the wider notion since "[e]very result of chance is from what is spontaneous, but not everything that is from what is spontaneous is from chance".[75] Gregoras reversed the Aristotelian hierarchical relation between chance and spontaneity by claiming that "spontaneity would result from chance, but … the opposite would not be possible". In other words, Gregoras restricted Aristotle's doctrine by rejecting the predication of spontaneity to both rational and irrational beings. Gregoras rendered the relationship between chance as accidental cause and rationality (to be understood as capability to exercise choice) as an exclusive one, thus no

71 For an extended discussion of the concepts of chance and spontaneity in Gregoras' *Roman History*, see Manolova, "Who Writes the History of the Romans?".

72 Aristotle, *Physics* II 5, 197a6–197a7.

73 Aristotle, *Physics* II 3, 194b16–194b23.

74 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, no. 42, ed. Leone, p. 146, l. 52–54: ὡς οὐκ ἐπίσης τύχη καὶ αὐτόματον. τύχῃ μὲν γὰρ αὐτόματον ἕποιτ᾽ ἄν, τοὐναντίον δ᾽ οὐκ ἂν εἴη. ἡ μὲν γὰρ ὡς τὰ πολλὰ τοῖς προαίρεσιν ἔχουσιν ἡγουμένην ὁρᾶται παρυφισταμένη.

75 Aristotle, *Physics* II 6, 197a37–197b1: τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἀπὸ τύχης πᾶν ἀπὸ ταὐτομάτου, τοῦτο δ᾽ οὐ πᾶν τύχης. Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Hardie/Gaye, vol. 1, p. 28.

chance can result from spontaneity, since the latter only affects the irrational and inanimate:

> We use the term *automaton* whenever the end may turn out a thing, which itself comes to pass in vain and not for the sake of something. This very thing may be observed either in such beings, or rather in the case of the irrational and inanimate beings and those which do not exercise a choice. For as the chance coexists with those who exercise a choice and possess judgement, so then the spontaneity [coexists] with those whose governor is the nature.[76]

The reversal of Aristotle's doctrine allowed Gregoras to restrict the role and influence of *tyche* and, further, to assign responsibility to the choosing agent for every result that can be seen as caused by chance. Consequently, the degree of *tyche*'s influence becomes dependent on human free will.

The theoretical framework outlined in Letter 42 is instrumental for the understanding of Gregoras' Letter 134, a friendship letter which problematizes Aristotle's stance on *tyche* as presented by Gregoras, and its role as an agent capable of altering the relationship of friendship by affecting the equality of the friends. Letter 134, addressed to Ignatios the metropolitan of Thessaloniki, was written after an interruption of the correspondence between the two men:

> And … as I was observing your silence … a certain ignoble cowardice, secretly creeping on double ways, tried gently to divide my common sense, accusing the fluid and unsteady with regard to the fortunes [*tas tychas*] of men.[77]

Gregoras thought that Aristotle was to blame, and as Gregoras had been the one often to bring Aristotle's teachings to Ignatios' ears, he deemed himself justified to speak up and refute Aristotle:

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76 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, no. 42, ed. Leone, p. 147, l. 57–61: αὐτόματον δέ φαμεν ὅταν αὐτὸ μάτην καὶ μὴ οὗ γε εἵνεκα γινόμενόν ἐστι τὸ τέλος ἀπαντᾷ. τουτὶ δ' ὁρᾶται/ὁρῷτο μὲν κἀν τούτοις, ὁρῷτο δ' ἂν κἀν τοῖς ἀλόγοις μᾶλλον καὶ ἀψύχοις καὶ ὁπόσα μὴ προαίρεσιν ἐσχήκει. ὡς γὰρ ἡ τύχη τοῖς προαίρεσιν καὶ κρίσιν ἔχουσι παρυφίσταται, οὕτω δὴ τὸ αὐτόματον, οἷς οἰκονόμος ἡ φύσις.

77 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, no. 134, ed. Leone, p. 337, l. 26–30: … ὁρῶντι τὴν σὴν σιωπὴν … δειλία τις οὐκ ἀγεν<ν>ὴς λάθρᾳ ὑφέρπουσα πρὸς διπλᾶς ὁδοὺς ἠρέμα τὴν ἐμὴν ἐπειρᾶτο σχίζειν διάνοιαν, αἰτιωμένη τὸ περὶ τὰς τύχας τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὑγρὸν καὶ ἀστάθμητον.

> After your letters through which you sent holy and pious words had appeared, they persuaded me to conceive, instead of the previous silence, these discourses trying to persuade you that not only me, but also Aristotle the son of Nikomachos is to be blamed: for it seems that that man is a sophist and someone subtle and powerful in misleading the reasoning of [his] audience. Wherefore, I myself, having brought you together with him often on many occasions and having brought [you] to listen to the things said by him, I deemed it unnecessary to be silent in every way, but in some cases it is possible also to refute him as much as it is befitting and to censure him for not declaring his opinion on the matters according to a great authority without scrutiny, [matters] which do not like to surrender their understanding easily; and now, after having obtained the great strength of your alliance, I would neither refrain myself from pouring plentiful and yet weightier refutations than his, nor would I withhold myself from persuading others to believe that most of his teachings are sophist-like and not beneficial.[78]

Gregoras' main accusation against Aristotle, as expounded in Letter 134, was that his theory of friendship postulated equality and that friends' things are common, thus, should inequality be introduced in the relationship between two people, their bond could no longer be qualified as one of friendship:

> For in addition to other things he said also that it is necessary not to wish the greatest among the goods for one's friends: for by surpassing the existing fortune [*tyche*], they are hardly able to obtain the equal friendship. For how would there be still 'things common to the friends', since [their] fortune [*tyche*] is not common? How 'a single soul' and one character, since the souls are ruled by the order-lacking chance [*tyche*], even if through assemblies, appointments, and positions they have something more than the settled condition of the always and in all regards demanding [*tyche*].

78 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, no. 134, ed. Leone, pp. 336–37, l. 1–14: Ἐμὲ δὲ τὰ σὰ μεθ' ὧν ἀπέστειλας ἱερὰ καὶ θεῖα γράμματα ἐπιδεδημηκότα λόγους ὑπὲρ τῆς προτέρας τούτους ἔπεισαν ποιεῖσθαι σιγῆς πειρωμένους σε πείθειν μὴ ἐμὲ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἀριστοτέλην ἐκεῖνον αἰτιᾶσθαι τὸν Νικομάχου· σοφιστὴς γάρ τις καὶ ποικίλος ὁ ἀνὴρ εἶναι δοκεῖ καὶ δεινὸς ἀκροατῶν διάνοιαν παρακρούσασθαι. διὸ καὶ αὐτὸς ἔγωγε ἐν πολλοῖς πολλάκις αὐτῷ σε συμμίξας καὶ τῶν αὐτῷ λεγομένων εἰς ἀκοὴν καταστάς, οὐκ ἔκρινα δεῖν σιωπᾶν πανταχῇ, ἀλλ' ἔστιν οὗ καὶ ἐξελέγχειν αὐτὸν καθ' ὅσον οἷόν τε καὶ ἐπιτιμᾶν μὴ κατὰ πολλὴν αὐθεντίαν ἄνευ τοῦ σκέπτεσθαι ἀποφαίνεσθαι περὶ πραγμάτων, ὅσα μὴ ῥᾷστα προδιδόναι τὴν αὐτῶν ἐθέλουσι κατάληψιν καὶ νῦν δ' ἀπὸ σοῦ πολὺ τῆς συμμαχίας εἰληφὼς τὸ κράτος οὐκ ἂν οὔτ' αὐτὸ ἀποσχοίην τοῦ μὴ πλείους ἔτι καὶ βαρυτέρους αὐτοῦ καταχεῖν τοὺς ἐλέγχους οὔτ' ἄλλους πείθειν ἀπαγορεύσαιμι σοφιστικὰ καὶ ἀξύμφορα τῶν ἐκείνου δογμάτων οἴεσθαι τὰ πλείω.

> For he says 'equality is friendship'. Conversely, inequality is the mother of separation. For usually it [i.e., inequality] easily overthrows the judgement and plays tricks with the character and bursts madly in suspicion, and so great and such [inequalities] do not adapt naturally to friendship. Saying this, he [i.e., Aristotle] introduced also Empedokles as an ally for the doctrine, as he says that 'the like is drawn to the like.'[79]

Here Gregoras problematizes a fundamental principle of medieval epistolography, namely what the friends-correspondents should be. The impossibility of achieving friendship when the letter-writer and the addressee have become unequal and not alike, however, is related to the role and influence of chance (*tyche*). While equality preconditions friendship and union of the souls, inequality interferes with one's judgements, influences one's character and opens the door for suspicion which, in turn, leads to separation, and thus does not naturally pertain to friendship. In addition, though ideally the friends' souls seek a union, they are still always governed by fortune and fortune rules them without any order. Thus, according to Gregoras, people were either "settled in one place of the fortune [*tyche*] and likely to remain in similar ways", or "in their turn, divided among themselves towards the paths of the fortune [*tyche*]".[80]

When he resumed his correspondence with Ignatios, Gregoras argued against the thesis that friends who have become unequal due to the influence of chance cannot maintain their previous relationship. In particular, Gregoras emphasized that Ignatios remained stable and unmoved, did not succumb to vanity or pride and by doing so, first refuted Aristotle's doctrine as his countenance demonstrated that one can overcome the influence of *tyche*; and second, proved that *tyche* does not entirely govern human souls:

79 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, no. 134, ed. Leone, p. 337, l. 14–26: πρὸς γὰρ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἔλεγε καὶ δεῖν μὴ τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀγαθῶν τοῖς φίλοις συνεύχεσθαι· τὴν γὰρ οὖσαν ὑπερβάντας τύχην ἥκιστ' ἔχειν τὴν ὁμοίαν ἔτι δύνασθαι φιλίαν. ποῦ γὰρ ἂν εἴη 'κοινὰ τὰ τῶν φίλων' ἔτι, τῆς τύχης οὐκ οὔσης κοινῆς; ποῦ δὲ 'ψυχὴ μία' καὶ τρόπος εἷς, τυραννουμένων τῶν ψυχῶν ὑπό γε τῆς λειποτακτούσης τύχης κἀν συλλόγοις καὶ καθέδραις τε καὶ στάσεσι πλεῖον ἔχειν τοῦ καθεστῶτος ἀπαιτούσης ἐν πᾶσιν ἀεί; 'ἰσότης' γάρ φησι 'φιλότης'· τοὐναντίον δ' ἀνισότης μήτηρ διαστάσεως. ῥᾷστα γὰρ εἴωθεν αὕτη ἀναμοχλεύειν τὴν γνώμην καὶ καπηλεύειν τὸ ἦθος καὶ ὑποψίας ἀναβακχεύειν, ὁπόσαι καὶ οἷαι μὴ μάλα ἁρμόττουσαι τῇ φιλίᾳ πεφύκασι. ταῦτα λέγων, ἐπήγετο καὶ Ἐμπεδοκλέα συμμαχοῦντα τῷ δόγματι καὶ 'τὸ ὅμοιον τοῦ ὁμοίου ἐφίεσθαι' φάσκοντα.

80 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, no. 134, ed. Leone, p. 337, l. 32–35: τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ἐφ' ἑνὸς ἱδρυμένοις χωρίου τῆς τύχης εἰκὸς καὶ τοῖς ὁμοίοις ἐπιμένειν τρόποις, τοῖς δ' αὖ μεριζομένοις ἐς τοὺς δρόμους τῆς τύχης, πάντας μὲν οὐκ ἄν ποτ' εἴποιμι, ξυνεξοκέλλειν δ' οὖν ἐνίους οὐκ ἄν ποτ' αὐτὸς ἀπαγορεύσαιμι.

> After you, who had rooted and established yourself firmly and well in the honorable foundation of the spirit, remained standing unmoved upon those pillars and in such greatness of the fortune [*tyche*] you absolutely preserved the mind free from pride and vanity and as long as in the opposite case – [that is] if you fell down from some height to the depths of the sea – you distributed the judgement in this way, granted me great strength against Aristotle's teachings and armed me instantly with fierce refutations against his head.[81]

According to Gregoras, Ignatios refuted Aristotle once more, as his behavior demonstrated that chance is not a fundamental and prevailing principle in the life of mankind, but lacks substance and is just a word. In fact, Gregoras argued that only the weak-minded, those who yield control of their reasoning and open room for ignorance, are prompt to attribute significance to *tyche*, since they renounce the possibility of judging for themselves the changing flow of events:[82]

> I acknowledged gratitude to you not only on account of all things but rather with regard to [your] alliance in the war against Aristotle. For you demonstrated that chance [*tyche*] is not any substance, but only a name that goes around and wanders, and gives trouble to the hearing of the more susceptible. When one belongs to those who at some point yield the reins of reason and who in no way grant an authoritative judgement to the recognition of the things which move sometimes in this way, sometimes in that, thence the ignorance seizes a position and in precisely this way somehow introduces the name of fortune, like darkness after the light.[83]

81 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, no. 134, ed. Leone, pp. 337–38, l. 40–47: ἐπεὶ δὲ σὺ καλῶς καὶ βεβαίως ἐρριζωμένος καὶ ἡδρασμένος τῷ καλῷ θεμελίῳ τοῦ πνεύματος ἔμεινας ἐπὶ τῶν ὅρων ἐκείνων ἱστάμενος ἀκλινὴς καὶ ὀφρύος καὶ τύφου παντὸς ἐλεύθερον τὸ φρόνημα καθάπαξ τετήρηκας ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ μεγέθει τῆς τύχης, καὶ ὥσπερ ἂν τὸ ἀντίστροφον εἰ ἐξ ὕψους τινὸς ἐς βυθοὺς θαλαττίους αὐτὸς κατηνέχθης, οὕτω τὴν γνώμην διέθηκας, πολλὴν ἐμοὶ τὴν ἰσχὺν κατὰ τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους ἐχαρίσω δογμάτων καὶ δριμυτέρους ἤδη κατὰ τῆς ἐκείνου κεφαλῆς τοὺς ἐλέγχους ἐξώπλισας.

82 Gregoras' argument is in fact similar to the position expressed by the Stoics. See Brouwer, "Polybius and Stoic *Tyche*", p. 114.

83 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, no. 134, ed. Leone, p. 338, l. 52–59: χάριτας οὖν σοι μὴ μόνον τῶν ὅλων ὡμολογησάμην ἕνεκα, ὅτι μὴ μᾶλλον τῆς συμμαχίας τοῦ πρὸς Ἀριστοτέλην πολέμου. ἔδειξας γὰρ οὐκ οὐσίαν οὖσαν τὴν τύχην τινά, ἀλλ' ὄνομα μόνον περιϊὸν καὶ πλανώμενον καὶ ταῖς τῶν κουφοτέρων ἀκοαῖς ἐνοχλοῦν· ὧν δὴ τοῦ λογισμοῦ τὰς ἡνίας ὁπώσποτε ἐνδιδόντων καὶ κρίσιν ἡγεμονικὴν οὐδαμῇ χαριζομένων τῇ τῶν κινουμένων ἄλλοτ' ἄλλως πραγμάτων ἐπιστασίᾳ, χώραν

Within an essentialist framework, Letter 42 reads as philosophical and didactic based on its subject matter and function, while its epistolary features should be categorized as formal and, thus, unrelated to the philosophical knowledge the missive delivers. Conversely, Letter 134 reads as a highly rhetorical text whose defining characteristics pertain to its purpose and function, such as self-fashioning through displays of erudition on behalf of Gregoras, praise of the correspondent, and maintaining a social relationship of epistolary friendship. Thus, its criticism of Aristotle's theory of friendship, as presented by Gregoras, and the relationship it draws between rationality, choice, and the influence of *tyche* on the equality of the friends fall out of the focus of an essentialist approach. Correspondently, the value of Letter 134 for the study of philosophy, friendship theories, and letter-writing in Byzantium is obscured and diminished.

In conclusion, the study of Byzantine philosophical thought and literature, including philosophical epistolography, depends heavily on one's definition of philosophy in respect to its cultural, intellectual, social, and disciplinary context in Byzantium. The intention to study Byzantine philosophy in its own right and according to intrinsic criteria defining the philosophical prompted scholars to consider its unsystematic character[84] or even multiple philosoph*ies*.[85] While scholars favoring an essentialist approach to the philosophical literature of Byzantium have pointed out the limited number of examples of philosophical discussions in letter form, no other theoretical approaches have been employed for the study of philosophical epistolography. While the relevance of applying critical theory to Byzantine letters or Byzantine philosophy ought to be scrutinized, it is beyond doubt that the polymathic character of philosophy in Byzantium as a discipline and social practice coupled with the increased fusion of rhetoric and philosophy from the eleventh century onwards remain out of the scope of an essentialist reading. Thus, in my opinion, the understanding of letters and letter collections such as that of Nikephoros Gregoras requires examination of the epistolary and the philosophical *qua* discourses rather than form and subject matter. Finally, it is noteworthy that the discussion of Byzantine letter-writing goes hand in hand with that of literary friendship. While friendship topoi are intrinsic to the Byzantine letter at large, provided the sufficient philosophical competence of the author, they also create the

λαμβάνειν ἐντεῦθεν τὴν ἄγνοιαν καὶ οὑτωσί πως τὸ τῆς τύχης παρεισάγειν ὄνομα, καθάπερ σκότος μεθισταμένου φωτός.

84 Kapriev, *Philosophie in Byzanz*.

85 Trizio, "Byzantine Philosophy as a Contemporary Historiographical Project".

possibility for the development of theories of friendship and, thus, open new venues for the study of Byzantine ethics.

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CHAPTER 10

Epistolary Culture and Friendship

Emmanuel C. Bourbouhakis

Asked to describe the function of letter-writing, a (literate) Byzantine would have no doubt included its value to friends who found themselves separated by distance, as must have happened regularly to educated men posted to the provinces as bishops, judges, or sent away for long periods on imperial assignments. Unable to share each other's company and conversation, they resorted to letters. And though they frequently and somewhat formulaically describe these as a poor substitute for direct contact, they seem to have gained not only solace but real delight from writing and reading such letters. None of this is unfamiliar to us, of course. Yet so formative was the role assigned to friendship in Byzantine epistolary language, that its *topoi* or commonplaces found their way into a broad cross section of medieval Greek correspondence. Indeed, friendship came to serve often as the explicit warrant of letter-writing, thereby making many correspondents "friends" of a sort.

Letter-writing was deemed complementary to, or interdependent with, friendship as it was to no other social relation, including that of immediate family. As such, it functioned as an enabling motif of letter-writing. But even as the present chapter argues that friendship authorized so much Byzantine epistolography, it does not venture an account of Byzantine friendship *per se*. For even though such an account would rely inordinately on epistolography for evidence of how friendship was conceived and conducted in Byzantium, its aim would ultimately be different from that of understanding the role of friendship in epistolography. Consequently, we have to distinguish, if only notionally, between letters *to* friends and friendship *in* letters. While the former could, and often did, contain explicit appeals to φιλία, friends writing letters could also afford to dispense with open references to "friendship". Conversely, letters which invoked friendship, often expatiating on its obligations and advantages, were just as often written to what we might cautiously describe as friends of expediency. It was this very socially eclectic nature which enabled the broad application of the language of friendship across a variety of epistolary occasions.

As unsurprising as it may be that literate friends in any age should have chosen to write letters to one another, we cannot help but take note of how frequently Byzantines seem to have dwelt on friendship in their correspondence.

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Consider a typical example, a letter written at the turn of the eleventh century by Stephen, bishop of Nicomedia, to Leo, the metropolitan of Synada. Stephen laments to Leo the unfortunate hiatus in their correspondence and expresses his fear that the silence has taken its toll on their friendship. Employing the simile of friendship as an oil lamp requiring the fuel of steady correspondence, he hopes the present letter will stoke the embers of their still smoldering relationship:

> A lamp, too, would be snuffed out for good very quickly, unless someone tops it up with oil; likewise, the light of affection risks waning if those who hold each other dear are not in constant communication, either in person, or by letters when they are separated. Since this is the very thing we feared, that long absence and distance, and a prolonged period without communication would extinguish the flame of our long-standing friendship, we set out to write this letter, raking the embers of love and reigniting the light in them and kindling up the flame, as it were, sky-high. Note how much time has passed and no letters have travelled regularly between us, no friendly greetings, no tokens of affection. And while I hold myself responsible for this protracted silence, I nevertheless blame you too, whom I miss, for being equally silent, and I think it fit for us to be greeted with a friendly letter which will relate to us how things are with you; though may you always fare well, as we hope.[1]

Having anticipated the effects on their friendship of long separation, Stephen claims they had (mis)placed their faith in letter-writing. He divides the blame equally for their common failure to follow through on the pledge to write to one another. The delicate simile of a light on the verge of expiring may sound needlessly melodramatic to us but it was meant to convey the stakes for "friends". Moreover, the claim that letters were the only redress available

1 Stephen of Nicomedia in Leo of Synada, *Letters*, no. 34, ed. and trans. Vinson, p. 56, l. 1–15: Καὶ ὁ λύχνος, εἰ μή τις αὐτὸν τῷ ἐλαίῳ ἐπάρδοι, τάχιστα ἂν πάντως ἀποσβεσθῇ· καὶ τὸ τῆς ἀγάπης φῶς, εἰ μὴ συνεχῶς οἱ φιλοῦντες ἀλλήλοις ὁμιλοῖεν ἢ παρόντες, ἢ ἀπόντες τοῖς γράμμασι, κινδυνεύσοι ἂν ἀπομαρανθῆναι. Ὅπερ ἡμεῖς δεδιότες μή ποτε ἡ μακρὰ ἀπουσία τε καὶ διάστασις καὶ τὸ ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἀνομίλητον τὸν τηλικοῦτον τῆς φιλίας ἀποσβέσει πυρσόν, πρὸς τὴν παροῦσαν γραφὴν ὡρμήθημεν, τοὺς τῆς ἀγάπης ἀνασκαλεύοντες ἄνθρακας καὶ τὸ ἐν αὐτοῖς φῶς ἀναζωπυροῦντες καὶ οἱονεὶ πρὸς μετέωρον φλόγα ἀνάπτοντες. Ἰδὲ γὰρ ὅσος ἐρρύη χρόνος καὶ οὐ παρ᾽ ἀλλήλοις ἐφοίτησαν γράμματα, οὐ προσρήσεις φιλικαί, οὐ σύμβολα τῆς ἀγάπης. Μέμφομαι μὲν οὖν ἐμαυτῷ τῆς ἐπὶ τοσούτῳ σιγῆς· αἰτιῶμαι δὲ καὶ τὸν ποθούμενον σὲ ὡς ἐπίσης σιγήσαντα, καὶ ἀξιῶ γράμμασιν ἡμᾶς δεξιώσασθαι φιλικοῖς καὶ δηλῶσαι ὡς ἔχει τὰ σά· ἔχοι δὲ πάντως καλῶς καὶ ὡς εὐκταῖον ἡμῖν. For the identification of the author of the letter as Stephen, see Vinson's commentary, pp. 119–20. See also Darrouzès, *Épistoliers byzantins*, p. 192, n. 21.

against the attrition of "long absence, separation, and lack of communication" spoke to the perceived vulnerability of social relationships and the potential value of epistolography. The *fact* of the letter, as much as anything said in it, was significant. The assumption that simply writing letters might sustain a friendship underwrote the claim that correspondence was motivated above all by the disinterested desire of friends to commune with one another verbally. This assertion would prove vital to the role assigned to friendship as an enabling condition of letter-writing in Byzantium, not seldom providing an alibi for more self-serving motivations.

In what is still the standard survey of Byzantine epistolary motifs of the middle Byzantine period, G. Karlsson sought the origins of most discourse about friendship in the trope of separation and the erosion of the bonds between friends.[2] It was the abiding fear of losing a friend, as much as any delight in communicating with one, that seems to have prompted letter-writers to compose epistolary paeans to friendship itself, often to compensate for long lapses in correspondence. Karlsson noted that friendship played an outsize role as a theme of letter-writing and drew on language that sometimes went back to antiquity.[3] But if such a proportion of epistolary *topoi* relate to friendship – the letter conjuring the illusion of presence, the letter as icon of the soul, consolation for an absent friend, the intellectual or affective communion of correspondents – it was because a significant share of Byzantine epistolography broadly traded on friendship as both a social and rhetorical construct.

Karlsson's catalogue of epistolary commonplaces reveals how resourceful Byzantines proved in exploiting friendship when composing letters. Yet the shortcoming of Karlsson's survey is not, as some have argued, that it remains incomplete. It is, rather, that his all too concise inventory of epistolary commonplaces offers little in the way of historical analysis to account for the widespread use of motifs such as friendship across various circumstances.[4] Karlsson helps perpetuate the impression that Byzantine letter-writers trafficked in

2 Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial*, p. 22. The vulnerability of friendship as a motif had Aristotelian authority in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 8, 1157b), a text well-known in Byzantium, if the Byzantine commentaries are any indication. See Konstan, *Aspasius*.

3 Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial*, pp. 34–37, 45–47, 48–56, 57–58, 58–61 94–98. On φιλία / *amicitia* in the letters of late antique bishops, see Allen/Neil, *Crisis Management*, pp. 16, 21, 33–34, 195, n. 4. In Ceccarelli's comprehensive *Ancient Greek Letter Writing*, friendship warrants little or no mention, perhaps a function of polis- rather than empire-based social relations. We are still without an account of why friendship became central to letter-writing (and letter-writing to friendship) in the post-Hellenistic world.

4 Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial*, pp. 21–23, 58–61.

epistolary clichés with little purchase on contemporary reality. Instead of bolstering our faith in the significance of friendship to Byzantine letter-writing, Karlsson's study makes us even more suspicious of a discourse about friendship that could be so mechanically reproduced. We may thus appreciate why scholars have not always been convinced that the reality of Byzantine friendship was commensurate with its prominence in letters.

In what has become a landmark article interrogating the alleged mistrust of friendship among Byzantines, M. Mullett asked the deceptively simple question, was Byzantium in fact "a friendly society"?[5] Her inquiry was prompted by a view then gaining ground that in a society marked by low levels of trust outside of kinship, few Byzantines placed much faith in friendship.[6] Mullett noted that both positive and negative views of friendship were to be found across a broad cross-section of Byzantine literature. Whatever else Byzantines may have thought about friendship, she pointed out, they were not indifferent to it.[7] Mullett was nevertheless quick to acknowledge that Byzantium produced no systematic treatises on friendship. She ascribes this to a marked preoccupation with individual friends, or φίλοι, over friendship, φιλία as a socially abstract category.[8] This should not be taken to mean that individual mentions of friendship in Byzantine letters were untethered from any broadly endorsed view of friendship's importance. Nor does it mean that the spirit and ethics of friendship were not regularly affirmed or even contested. We may look to epistolography as the principal forum in which literate Byzantines articulated shared norms of friendship, so much so that it prompted one editor of Byzantine letter-collections to conclude that "le genre épistolier est essentiellement φιλικός".[9] And yet as late as 1996, in an important essay on the still pending effort to "rehabilitate" Byzantine epistolography, Peter Hatlie could

5 Mullett, "Byzantium: A Friendly Society?"; Mullet might just as well have asked, was Byzantium really a *friendless* society?

6 Kazhdan first suggested that friendship was a suspect category of Byzantine social relations in "*Predvaritel'*nye Zamečanija o mirovozzrenii vizantiskogo mistika x–xi vv. Simeona", esp. pp. 19–20. He reiterated the argument in *Byzanz und seine Kultur*, pp. 118–19, 174–75, as well as in *People and Power*, pp. 26–28 and in *Change in Byzantine Culture*, pp. 132, 208.

7 In time, Mullett would go so far as to propose that friendship may have even competed with kinship as a productive social tie in Byzantium. See Mullett, "Friendship in Byzantium", p. 166.

8 Mullett, "Byzantium: A Friendly Society?", p. 12. But see the survey in Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede*, pp. 113–23.

9 Darrouzès, *Épistoliers byzantins*, p. 48.

justifiably claim that "basic epistolographic concerns, such as friendship, still await the attention of historians".[10]

But to understand why friendship and letter-writing could have become so closely bound up in Byzantium, we must set aside certain assumptions about both.[11] Conditioned to regard letters to friends as a channel of unrehearsed expression of private feelings and unvarnished thoughts, we could not begin from a position more at odds with an often pragmatic view of friendship fostered in Byzantine epistolography. Until recently, our own perceptions of the nature of friendship and the ends of letter-writing bore the unmistakable stamp of a Romantic sensibility which foregrounded the letter writer's interior life.[12] A corollary of this was to make the genuineness of friendship in letters depend on the degree of self-revelation and candor exhibited. In contrast, we are prone to mistrust exchanges between correspondents who seem to have approached each other with considerable circumspection and rhetorical pomp, as Byzantine letter-writers frequently did. At the root of scholarly skepticism regarding the social value of friendship in Byzantium is the perception that mentions of friendship in medieval Greek letters were not much more than a well-rehearsed *topos*, a rhetorically expedient *commonplace* with which to frame a letter's contents.[13] The frequent recourse to friendship in letters has thus seemed an unreliable index of the depth of relationships between correspondents.

This view may be at once correct and misleading. Friendship was subject to rhetorical amplification in Byzantine epistolography. But this should not be taken to mean that appeals to friendship were necessarily feigned or somehow false. The frequent, and seemingly formulaic, invocations of friendship are perhaps best understood as a function of social ritual rather than *mere* rhetoric.[14] Put differently, the designation "rhetoric" accords well with the fact that most epistolary discourse, including that of friendship, was largely situational. This was implicitly acknowledged by the Hellenistic-era handbooks, consulted throughout the Byzantine era, offering instruction in the composition

10 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", p. 247. I hope to meet at least part of this *desideratum* with a forthcoming monograph on Byzantine epistolography provisionally titled *Letter-writing and Epistolary Culture in Byzantium, 10th–12th c.*

11 For ancient views of friendship assumed to have been inherited by Byzantium, see Treu, "Freundschaft". For examples of the sociological and anthropological turn away from more literary approaches in the study of friendship, see Allan, *Friendship*; Bell/Coleman, *The Anthropology of Friendship*.

12 Trilling, *The Arts of Friendship*.

13 Koskenniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie*; see also Thraede, *Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Brieftopik*, pp. 125–46.

14 See also Chapter 11 in this volume.

of texts for different occasions, including letter-writing. The earliest of these to list friendship as germane to epistolography was the treatise *On Style* (Περὶ ἑρμηνείας), attributed to a certain Demetrios (*c.*200–100 BC):

> Who [one may ask] would, in conversation with a friend, so express himself as does Aristotle when writing to Antipater on the subject of the aged exile? …
>
> [L]abored letter-writing is not merely absurd; it does not even obey the laws of friendship …
>
> [The letter's] beauty consists in the expressions of friendship and the many proverbs which it contains. This last is the only philosophy admissible in it.[15]

To judge from such passages, while readers of the handbook took for granted the link between letters and friendship, they nevertheless sought stylistic guidance, help with striking the right tone. Handbooks dedicated specifically to epistolography, like that of Pseudo-Demetrios' *Epistolary Types* (Τύποι Ἐπιστολικοί), parsed letters into various aims and settings, including the "letter of the friendly sort" (τύπος φιλικός), a mainstay of Late Antique epistolary exchange. Quite significantly, the "friendly letter" was not predicated on an *a priori* friendship between correspondents. It was supposed to serve as a model for letters written "as if to a friend". The distinction reflected the importance of friendship as an enabling condition of social interactions conducted through letters. It stands to reason that incidental correspondence between friends probably had little need of instruction on how best to strike a "friendly" note. Letter-writing manuals offered prescriptions for letters *appearing* to have been written to friends. As Pseudo-Demetrios observes, "[t]hose who are [already] thoroughly friends do not write [such letters]". What need was there to write a letter assuming the rhetorical posture of a friend? The short answer is provided by the same handbook:

> The friendly type, then, is the one that seems to be written by a friend to a friend. But it is by no means [only] friends who write [in this manner].

15 Demetrios, *On Style* 225, 229, 232, ed. and trans. Chiron, pp. 63–65: Τίς γοῦν οὕτως ἂν διαλεχθείη πρὸς φίλον, ὥσπερ ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης πρὸς Ἀντίπατρον ὑπὲρ τοῦ φυγάδος γράφων τοῦ γέροντός φησιν … οὐδὲ γελοῖον μόνον [περιοδεύειν], ἀλλ' οὐδὲ φιλικόν … ἐπιστολαῖς ταῦτα ἐπιτηδεύειν … Κάλλος μέντοι αὐτῆς αἵ τε φιλικαὶ φιλοφρονήσεις καὶ πυκναὶ παροιμίαι ἐνοῦσαι· καὶ τοῦτο γὰρ μόνον ἐνέστω αὐτῇ σοφόν. Letter-writing itself appears as a coda in the final chapters of Demetrios' short treatise on style, suggesting it had recently joined more established genres on which contemporaries sought guidance.

> For frequently those in prominent positions are expected by some to write in a friendly manner to their inferiors and to others who are their equals, for example, to military commanders, viceroys, governors. There are times, indeed, when they write to them without knowing them [personally]. They do so, not because they are close friends and have [only] one choice [of how to write], but because they think that nobody will refuse them when they write in a friendly manner but will rather submit and heed what they are writing. Nevertheless, this type of letter is called friendly as though it were written to a friend.[16]

It is notable that the author of this popular handbook acknowledged a distinction between more intimate friends and those who may be addressed as friends for the purposes of a letter. The letter written "as if to a friend" encompassed a wider circle of potential correspondents. The handbook thus offers a glimpse into the social logic which made friendship rhetorically intrinsic to a significant range of post-Classical epistolography. Many letters to a broad segment of potential recipients had to be framed *as though* between friends in order to entitle the letter-writer to address his correspondent on suitably informal terms. This, in turn, points to the broader challenge posed by medieval Greek letter-writing, namely, that invocations of friendship in Byzantine epistolography were often trying to enact the very relationship to which we want them to testify. We are thus left trying to distinguish between what we regard as genuine friendships, from those positing friendship as a valid pretext; in short, between real and rhetorical friendship. It is worth recalling, however, that whether such a distinction *should* be drawn is different from whether it *can* be.[17]

Was friendship largely a phenomenon of epistolary rhetoric, and so of little psychological or emotional relevance beyond the stylized context of letters?[18] One possible answer may be provided by the studied eloquence with which

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16 Pseudo-Demetrios, *Epistolary Types* 1, ed. Weichert, p. 2, l. 19–p. 3, l. 5 (trans. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, p. 33): Ὁ μὲν οὖν φιλικός ἐστιν ὁ δοκῶν ὑπὸ φίλου γράφεσθαι πρὸς φίλον. γράφουσι δὲ οὐχ οἱ πάντως φίλοι. πολλάκις γὰρ ἐν ὑπάρχοις κείμενοι πρὸς ὑποδεεστέρους ὑπό τινων ἀξιοῦνται φιλικὰ γράψαι καὶ πρὸς ἄλλους ἴσους, στρατηγούς, ἐπιστρατήγους, διοικητάς. ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ προσγράφουσι τούτους ἀγνοοῦντες. οὐ γὰρ διὰ τὸ συγκεκρᾶσθαι καὶ μίαν ἔχειν αἵρεσιν τοῦτο πράττουσιν, ἀλλ᾽ οὐδένα νομίζοντες ἀντερεῖν αὐτοῖς φιλικὰ γράφουσιν, <ἀλλ᾽> ὑπομενεῖν καὶ ποιήσειν περὶ ὧν γράφουσιν. ὁ μέντοι τύπος καλεῖται τῆς ἐπιστολῆς φιλικὸς ὡς πρὸς φίλον γραφόμενος.

17 The effort to distinguish sincere from simulated sentiment in the letters has been labelled naïve. See Mullett, "Friendship in Byzantium", p. 170.

18 Ibid., p. 166: "[t]he role of friendship in Byzantine society goes far beyond the rehearsing of an inherited literary vocabulary".

friendship is invoked in Byzantine letters. What should we make of a letter such as the following by the twelfth-century scholar-poet for hire, John Tzetzes, who cites friendship no fewer than eight times in a single letter addressed to a "friend"?

> My blessed lord, the course of earthly things, which of its own nature is perpetually subject to vicissitudes and reversals, has now furnished us with a timely opportunity which might serve as an accurate judge and reliable scale of your *friendship*. You, too, can now show whether the things you said formerly were but myths uttered in vain, when you said that you would speak unreservedly on our behalf if a certain church were left widowed of her captain, and that you would demonstrate a genuinely steadfast and inimitable *friendship* worthy of your nobility. For it is not just the current opportunity which calls on you, but the widowed community of Mideia as well, to fulfill your steadfast promise of *friendship* by finishing this race summa cum laude on behalf of *a genuine friend*. If you should enter this contest and win, I will keep quiet about the remaining aspects of our *friendship*, but I will not shrink from proclaiming as loudly as possible, that your own flock and that of Mideia will be one. For my part, being busy with obligations and [unforeseen] circumstances I have not been able to visit you in person since I have been unable to extricate myself altogether from here. But knowing what *friendship* may achieve, by means of this letter I appeal to your great sense of *friendship* as well as your magnanimity, that you will not overlook the bonds of *friendship*.[19]

19 John Tzetzes, *Letters*, no. 7, ed. Leone, p. 15, l. 15–p. 16, l. 12: Ἡγιασμένε μοι δέσποτα, ἡ τῶν γεηρῶν πραγμάτων φορὰ ὡς ἐκ φύσεως ἀειρρόως κυβευομένη καὶ μεταπίπτουσα νῦν καιρὸν ἡμῖν ἐπεισήγαγε διαιτητὴν ἀκριβῆ καὶ ταλαντοῦχον **φιλίας** ἐπιγνώμονα· δείξεις δὲ νῦν καὶ αὐτὸς εἰ μὴ τηνάλλως ἦσαν μῦθοι τὰ πρώην λεγόμενα παρὰ σοῦ, ὡς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ὑπερλαλήσαις ὁλοσχερέστερον χηρευούσης τινὸς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ ναυκληροῦντος αὐτήν, καὶ ὡς δείξαις **φιλίαν** ὄντως ἀκραιφνεστάτην καὶ ἀπροσποίητον καὶ τῆς σῆς εὐγενείας ἐπάξιον. καλεῖ γάρ σε μονονουχὶ αὐτὸς ὁ καιρός, ναὶ μὴν καὶ ἡ χηρεύουσα Μίδεια, πληρῶσαι ἀκραιφνεστάτην σου τῆς **φιλίας** ὑπόσχεσιν ἀγωνισάμενον λίαν καλῶς ὑπὲρ ἀνδρὸς γνησίου καὶ **φίλου** τοῦτον τὸν δίαυλον. εἰ δέ γε τοῦτον ἀεθλεύσας πληρώσεις τὸν ἄεθλον, τὰ μὲν λοιπὰ τῆς **φιλίας** σιγῶ, τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ ὀκνήσαιμι τρανότερον ἐπιφθέγξασθαι, ὡς μία ποίμνη ἐσεῖται ἥ τε σὴ καὶ ἡ Μίδεια. ἐγὼ δὲ ἄσχολος μυρίαις γενόμενος δουλείαις καὶ περιστάσεσιν αὐτοπροσώπως ἰδεῖν σε οὐκ ἴσχυσα διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐξελθεῖν με πάντως αὐτόθι· εἰδὼς δὲ τὴν **φιλίαν** ὅσα καὶ δύναται, διὰ τῆς παρούσης γραφῆς μου ἠξίωσα τὴν σὴν **μεγαλοφιλίαν** ἅμα καὶ μεγαλόνοιαν τῶν **φιλικῶν** θεσμῶν μὴ λαθέσθαι.

Tzetzes' letter appears to have been composed with friendship as its rhetorical centerpiece.[20] We might ask ourselves what meaning attached to the word φιλία that it could be invoked in so calculated a fashion, assertively entreating its addressee while still remaining obviously deferential? Viewed rather as an enabling *topos* than as a heartfelt avowal of sincerely felt sentiments, the theme of friendship here amounts to more than a rhetorical pretext intended to advance a highly utilitarian aim. Epistolary avowals of friendship were the declarative equivalent of "rarefied gestures ... part of the social code in twelfth-century Byzantium".[21] To profess oneself a "friend" amounted to an active pledge, to be borne out eventually by one's actions. The undisguised *quid pro quo* may strike us as incongruous with the disinterested ideal of friendship we espouse. But it may be that our own conception of friendship was all but inconceivable in a premodern society marked by scarcity of opportunity and minimal protections against the influence which others could call upon by virtue of family ties or social station.[22] One could simply not afford to cultivate bonds free from utility.

A significant share of surviving Byzantine letters amounted to informal petitions to "friends" in order to secure some favor. When not pleading their own case, most of our letter-writers may be found interceding on behalf of others, most often by way of letters of introduction. Owing to a certain social logic, the letter-writer vouchsafed the person being recommended by invoking friendship as an affirmation of trust among all involved, as well as the implied promise of future reciprocity. The prospective patron was thus assured of not squandering scarce social capital.[23] So the eleventh-century court intellectual Michael Psellos seems to have cultivated a reputation for acting as an intermediary via letters to various dignitaries, officials, and men of standing in letters to whom he underscores "friendship" as the reason for obliging him by asking them to extend support to a "mutual friend".[24] Thus, writing to a judge with jurisdiction over the empire's southern provinces, Psellos asks that he arrange

20 The accompanying manuscript title reads Ὡς ἀπό τινος διακόνου πρὸς ἐπίσκοπον ("as though from a certain deacon to a bishop"), suggesting that Tzetzes was commissioned to write the letter, a practice which may have been more widespread than has been previously acknowledged in the scholarship.

21 Kolovou, "Ceremonies and Performances", p. 63.

22 Silver, "Friendship in Commercial Society".

23 See Asch, "Freundschaft und Patronage", pp. 265–86. Many of the questions raised by Asch for the early modern period could be asked, *mutatis mutandis*, for Byzantium, as well.

24 See Tinnefeld, "'Freundschaft' in den Briefen des Michael Psellos". For a more systematic account of friendship in the letter as the basis for a broader intellectual profile of Psellos, see Ljubarskij, *Michail Psell*, pp. 117–22 (= *Η προσωπικότητα*, pp. 178–83).

the reinstatement of the metropolitan of Larissa. Rather than plead the ousted metropolitan's case, however, Psellos invokes his friendship with both men:

> While the most honorable [metropolitan] of Larissa is truly both a rather humble man and one possessed of a reverend soul, he is a friend of mine as well. And he stands in need of your support on many counts. And while I have many friends, none however is quite like you. Time itself has demonstrated the exact extent of our mutual friendship. It is on this account that I presume to call on the most honorable beauty of your goodwill and affection to see to it that the metropolitan obtain his bishopric and that you show him the full measure of your attachment to me, so that he might know that I do not err in my choice of friends.[25]

Psellos effectively balances the worthy character of the prospective beneficiary against the fact that he is a friend. The merits of the case notwithstanding, Psellos implies, friendship should nevertheless suffice to obtain a favorable intervention on the judge's part. While intercession and patronage of this sort are not in themselves unremarkable, the rationale invoked here deserves notice. Psellos makes no attempt to plead the cleric's case. He dwells instead on the mutual affection and esteem between himself and his correspondent, framing the request as a test of their enduring friendship. Since most such requests in writing had to be made to social superiors or peers in positions from which they could dispense patronage, invoking friendship helped bridge the often vertiginous gap with the petitioner, lest he appear presumptuous or servile. Psellos writes in a similar vein to a certain Romanos, a man he had known since their schooldays, in a bid to persuade him to offer literary commissions to two talented protégés studying with Psellos:

> My most yearned-for lord, I trust that you have not altogether forgotten the friendship we had agreed to maintain towards one another permanently when we were at school together, sharing a common life and jointly taking part in our lessons. If this is indeed the case, as I think it is,

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25 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 320, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 727: Ὁ τιμιώτατος Λαρίσσης, ἐστὶ μὲν τῷ ὄντι καὶ σεμνότατος ἄνθρωπος, καὶ σεβάσμιος τὴν ψυχήν, ἔστι δὲ καὶ φίλος ἐμός. Δεῖται δὲ ἐν πολλοῖς τῆς σῆς ἀντιλήψεως. Ἐμοὶ δὲ εἰ καὶ πολλοὶ φίλοι τυγχάνουσιν, ἀλλ᾽ οὐδεὶς τοιοῦτος ὁποῖος σύ· καὶ ὁ μακρὸς χρόνος τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους φιλίαν, καὶ ἀπέδειξε καὶ ἠκρίβωσε. Διὰ ταῦτα θαρρούντως ἀξιῶ σου τὴν ὑπέρτιμον καλλονήν, τῆς σῆς προθέσεως καὶ ἀγάπης τὸν μητροπολίτην ἀξιοῦν, ἀντιποιεῖσθαί τε τῆς κατ᾽ αὐτὸν μητροπόλεως, καὶ ὅλως ἐμφανίζειν αὐτῷ τὸ μέτρον τῆς πρὸς ἐμέ σου ἀγάπης, ἵνα καὶ οὕτως ἔχῃ γινώσκειν ὅτι οὐ σφάλλομαι περὶ τὰς τῶν φίλων ἐπιλογάς.

> and you still preserve a token of our friendship and some small spark of it may still be set alight; if it should not have been altogether extinguished and disappeared or time should have blackened it or some more recent friendship should have broken it off and consigned it to the depths of oblivion, show it now and I will be persuaded. You will demonstrate this if we obtain that which we seek; in any event, we don't ask for anything too great or impossible. The rest of my letter will make clear my request … This then, on the one hand, is my demand, at once small, in my opinion, and easy [to satisfy]. May it not befall you to disregard the request of a friend, lest posterity should speak ill of you.[26]

Like the bishop Stephen writing to Leo, Psellos trades on the metaphor of friendship burning like a flame, only this time it is said to burn bright (on Psellos' side, at least), despite the long epistolary silence between the two men. It is tempting to dismiss Psellos' appeal to a long-standing friendship as transparently utilitarian and therefore lacking any authentic attachment. Before doing so, however, we might consider that if that was indeed the case, it was even less likely to fool the letter's addressee. What is more, Psellos must have known this. His many similar letters on behalf of those who had sought letters of introduction or intercessionary appeals from him suggests a recognizable discourse. Everyone involved likely knew the terms of such epistolary rituals. Thus, Psellos chose to open a letter on behalf of a soldier seeking redress for his deferred service with a bit of disarming, self-satirizing humor. Anticipating his correspondent's exasperation after what may have been one too many requests based on their friendship, he writes:

> Is there anyone more fortunate than you, Maleses, [constantly] receiving requests and appeals from me? Not even in your dreams could you have anticipated such a thing! Now if you laughed at that, you understand the nature of friendship. If, on the other hand, you frowned as one who had suffered some indignity, I nevertheless remedy my situation, since I am

26 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 247, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, pp. 615–16: Οἴομαι μὴ παντάπασιν ἐπιλαθέσθαι σε τῆς ἡμετέρας φιλίας, ποθεινότατε κύριέ μου, ἣν ἀλλήλοις μόνιμον διατηρεῖν συνεθέμεθα, ὅτε τῶν αὐτῶν εἰχόμεθα μαθημάτων, κοινῇ τε συνδιήγομεν, καὶ κοινῇ τῶν ὅλων μετείχομεν παιδευμάτων. Εἰ τοίνυν οὕτως ἔχει ὡς οἴομαι, καὶ φιλίας παρὰ σοὶ λείψανον ἔτι, καὶ μικρός τις ἀνῆπται σπινθήρ, ἀλλὰ μὴ τελέως ἀπέσβη καὶ οἴχεται, μηδὲ χρόνος ταύτην ἠμαύρωσε, μηδὲ νεωτέρα φιλία παρέθραυσέ τε καὶ λήθης παραδεδώκει βυθοῖς, δεῖξον νῦν, καὶ πείθομαι. Δείξεις δέ, εἰ ὧν αἰτούμεθα τύχοιμεν· πάντως δὲ οὐ μεγάλα αἰτοῦμεν, οὐδὲ ἀδύνατα. Γνωρίσει δέ σοι τὴν αἴτησιν προϊὼν ὁ λόγος … Ἡ μὲν οὖν ἀξίωσις αὕτη, μικρά τε (ὡς οἴμαι) καὶ ῥᾳδία· σὸν δ' ἂν εἴη μή ἀνδρὸς φίλου παραλογίσασθαι αἴτησιν, ἵνα μή τις σε καὶ ὀψιγόνων κακῶς εἴπῃ ἀνδρῶν.

> pleased to appeal to my most excellent judge, an exceedingly learned man, who heaps praises on me, a singer second only to Terpander, as I think such a man must be regarded. But you figured out what I meant right away. What then is my request? … Therefore, if you care at all about the above-mentioned, both the just and poor soldier [in question] as well as my friendship, see to it that this soldier is freed.[27]

Always the shrewd rhetorician, Psellos outmaneuvers any objection regarding the abuse of his friendship with Maleses by leaving his correspondent no option save to laugh at his obnoxious claim. If it turns out that Maleses is not in a laughing mood and instead takes offense at the epistolary irreverence, Psellos facetiously assures him that he will at least have had occasion to greet his friend. While the exact purpose of the intercession sought cannot be clearly deduced from the letter, it is the correspondents' friendship which is foregrounded.[28] Should we infer from Psellos' preemptive deflection of his correspondent's indignation at being importuned like this once more that both the reality and the rhetoric of friendship were being strained by such epistolary appeals?

Mullett has made the point that "friendships were expected to work for friends".[29] The repeated invocation of friendship in Byzantine letters can at times seem little more than a means of leveraging otherwise "weak ties" of acquaintance into effective social capital.[30] Acknowledging his limitation, Psellos admits that "I am able to achieve nothing on my own, but quite a bit through you, my friends."[31] In a pre-modern society lacking many of the bureaucratic mechanisms by which to secure opportunity, friendship divorced

27 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 159, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 423, l. 1–18: Τίς σου μακαριώτερος, Μαλέση, δεχομένου παρ' ἐμοῦ αἰτήσεις καὶ ἀξιώσεις; Ὅπερ οὐδ' εἰς ὄναρ ποτὲ προσεδόκησας. Εἰ μὲν οὖν ἐγέλασας, ἐπέγνως τῆς φιλίας τὸν χαρακτῆρα. Εἰ δὲ ἐστύγνασας ὡς ὑβριοπαθήσας, ἐγὼ πάλιν ἰῶμαι τοὐμόν· χαίρω γὰρ ἀξιῶν τὸν κάλλιστόν μου κριτήν, τὸν λογιώτατον, τὸν ἐμὸν ἐπαινέτην, τὸν μετὰ Τέρπανδρον ἀοιδόν (ὅντινα τοῦτον ὑποληπτέον· ἀλλὰ σὺ αὐτίκα ἐμὲ ἐνενόησας). Τίς οὖν ἡ ἀξίωσις; … Εἴ τις οὖν σοι φροντίς, καὶ τῶν προῳκονομημένων καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ δικαίου, καὶ τοῦ πένητος στρατιώτου, καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς φιλίας, ἐλεύθερον τὸν στρατιώτην ἀπέργασαι.

28 For a plausible hypothesis of the soldier's predicament along with the identity of the addressee, see Jeffreys, *Letters of Psellos*, p. 122, as well as the accompanying bibliography.

29 Mullett, "Byzantium: A Friendly Society?", p. 13, n. 56 and 57.

30 On "strong" vs. "weak ties", see Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties". For the application of the concept of "weak ties" to Byzantine epistolary practice, see my forthcoming *Letter-writing and Epistolary Culture in Byzantium* and Chapter 16 in this volume.

31 Psellos, *Letters*, no. 302, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 712, l. 25–26: δύναμαι δὲ οὐδὲν μὲν παρ' ἐμαυτῷ, πολλὰ δὲ παρὰ τοῖς φίλοις ὑμῖν.

from practical or social utility might have sounded unpragmatically aloof.[32] Once again, Mullett helpfully observes that φίλος could mean "ally, supporter, spy, backer, useful friend, patron and client … all recognizable as participants in a single relationship".[33] This would have sounded quite familiar to a Roman of the late Republic or the Principate, just as it did throughout Late Antiquity and well into the Byzantine Middle Ages.[34]

Byzantine letter-writers were themselves not unaware that the sincerity of professed friendship could be called into question. Addressees whose rank or office invited ingratiating appeals had to be on their guard. Letter-writers, in turn, strove to assure their correspondents that utility was ultimately a secondary consideration, though by no means an illegitimate one. Writing to a high-placed official at court, the twelfth-century bishop of Athens, Michael Choniates, reassures his correspondent, Theodore Matzoukes, that whereas most of his letter-writing was prompted by necessity, the letters to him were motivated by an unconditional desire to address a friend. His purpose in writing, Choniates claims by means of an especially apt metaphor, is as free of ulterior motive as a desire to enjoy the sun's rays may be independent of the practical advantages of sunlight:

> While in the case of others, we are compelled to write letters according to the dictates of this or that need, in your case, a person of such value to me, I interact with you quite differently, in the same manner one does with the sun. For all of us always love to bask in the rays of the sun, even at those times when we are not laboring [in the sunlight]. I, too, cherish conversing with you and being in your presence through letters, even if there is no pressing matter of necessity. For such things are truly pursued for their own sake, which includes the friendship of high-minded men, so that if for whatever reason these should vanish, the friendship, too, disappears.[35]

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32 Wolf, "Kinship, Friendship and Patron-Client Relations"; see also Ahrweiler, "Recherches sur la société byzantine".

33 Mullett, "Byzantium: A Friendly Society?", p. 18; see also Boissevain, *Friends of Friends*.

34 As with so many aspects of Byzantine social organization, this view of friendship had been inherited from later Roman society. See Saller et al., *Personal Patronage*; see also Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society*.

35 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 59, ed. Kolovou, p. 80, l. 2–9: Τοῖς μὲν λοιποῖς ἄλλοτε ἄλλης χρείας ὑπαγορευούσης ἐπιστέλλειν βιαζόμεθα, σοὶ δὲ, ὦ τοῦ παντὸς ἀξία μοι κεφαλὴ, τρόπον ἄλλον καὶ ὃν τῷ ἡλίῳ προσομιλοῦμεν. Ταῖς τε γὰρ ἀκτῖσι τούτου ἐσαεὶ καὶ ὅτε μὴ πρὸς ἔργοις ὦμεν ἐπεντρανίζειν ἀγαπῶμεν πάντες, κἀγὼ δὲ φιλῶ προσλαλεῖν σοι καὶ διὰ γραμμάτων προσδέρκεσθαι, κἂν μή τι τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἐπεῖγόν ἐστιν. Τοιαῦτα γὰρ τὰ ὄντως καθ' αὑτὰ ἐφετὰ, οἷς καὶ ἡ τῶν σπουδαίων φιλία συντάττεται, ὡς ἥ γε διὰ τὰ καὶ τὰ τούτων ἐκλελοιπότων καὶ αὐτὴ

Choniates' allusion to the Aristotelian ideal of "things pursued for their own sake" (καθ' αὑτὰ ἐφετὰ) establishes the unimpeachable objective of his letter as grounded in friendship *for its own sake*.[36] By acknowledging Matzoukes' possible apprehensiveness, Choniates hoped to defuse his correspondent's wariness, much as Psellos had done in his teasing letter to Maleses. Choniates explains that their correspondence requires no more immediate cause than the high regard he has for his friend:

> I did not become attached to your splendid soul on account of the respect the emperors show you and your genuine closeness with them, nor on account of the presiding authority you exercise in public affairs, so that I might share in the eminence and opportunity. It was rather that I had long been aware of your excellent and virtuous nature as well as the infinite stream of your good traits, your guileless affection, your honest and steadfast character, your shrewd judgement in seeing important things accomplished and its effectiveness in public administration.[37]

The reassurance that his friendship with Matzoukes was not merely expedient suggests that such misgivings were not uncommon. Choniates takes care to praise his friend for the very character traits on which he has pinned his own hopes in this letter: the promise of unaffected devotion and steadfast character. These were the elements of true friendship as reiterated in letters: unfeigned fondness, honesty, and constancy of character (τὴν ἀκαπήλευτον ἀγάπην, τὸ φιλάληθες καὶ ἔμπεδον ἦθος), all variations on the ideal of the staunch supporter and ally. To shore up any persistent doubts, Choniates invokes the well-known Aristotelian prescription regarding the selective nature of true friendship, writing "I am not one to have many friends, nor am I the type to pour out my soul's affection to many and to divide it equally and separately".[38] Departing from the

συναπῴχετο. See Kolovou's introduction, p. 84* for Theodore Matzoukes and the aim of this letter.

36 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1170a.

37 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 59, ed. Kolovou, p. 80, l. 9–p. 81, l. 15: Οὔκουν οὐδὲ αὐτὸς συνεδέθην σοι τῇ θεσπεσίᾳ ψυχῇ διὰ τὴν παρὰ βασιλεῦσιν αἰδῶ καὶ γνησίαν οἰκείωσιν καὶ τὴν ἐν τοῖς δημοσίοις προεδρεύουσαν ὑπεροχὴν, ἵνα τι καὶ αὐτὸς παραπολαύω τοῦ ὕψους καὶ τοῦ καιροῦ, ἀλλὰ πάλαι τὸ σὸν φιλοκἄγαθον ἐπιγνοὺς καὶ τὸν ἄπειρον ἑσμὸν τῶν καλῶν, τὴν ἀκαπήλευτον ἀγάπην, τὸ φιλάληθες καὶ ἔμπεδον ἦθος, τὴν μεγαλοπράγμονα φρόνησιν καὶ τῇ διοικήσει τοῦ παντὸς ἀποχρῶσαν.

38 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 59, ed. Kolovou, p. 81, l. 17–18: Οὐ γὰρ πολύφιλός τις ἐγὼ, οὐδ' οἷος εἰς πολλοὺς τὸ φιλοῦν τῆς ψυχῆς ἐκχέειν καὶ καταμερίζειν ἰσόμοιρόν τε καὶ ταὐτοδύναμον. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1170b 23–24: καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς φιλίας ἁρμόσει μήτ' ἄφιλον εἶναι μήτ' αὖ πολύφιλον καθ' ὑπερβολήν.

epistolary *topos* of lamenting long spells without letters, Choniates assures his friend that his affection remains undiminished during hiatuses in their correspondence. To dispel any suspicion of a mercenary motive, Choniates tries to account for his poor epistolary habits:

> But it is even rarer that I address anyone in letters, at times perhaps because I am of a negligent nature when it comes to such things and I do not think much of them, at other times because I am prevented by both the mass of work and the great distance. This is the sort of person I am with those I cherish on account of their virtue, so that, even on those occasions when I write and ask for something, do not think that I put pen to paper for this reason alone, likewise, on those occasions when I do not write or require anything, know that I stand unwavering in my commitment to you … If this school teacher should ask anything at all of you, spare no effort to help him out, but do not suspect, once more, that I am writing you a letter on his account.[39]

Choniates underlines that his desire to write to his friend was paramount, and not the accompanying request on behalf of the *grammatikos*, who most likely carried the letter to its addressee. However, the claim that he wrote few letters is belied by the scale of his surviving epistolographic corpus. He nevertheless tried to preserve the integrity of the letter as an act of friendship, insulating it from cynicism about its utilitarian designs. To remain effective as a channel of social transaction, letters to friends had to retain some independence from pragmatic considerations. While it is perhaps less surprising that friendship was regularly invoked in letters seeking patronage, either for oneself or on behalf of others, it is nevertheless worth noting how often such letters had to spell out their social rationale. Thus, the twelfth-century author and cleric Michael Italikos expounds the premises for writing letters of recommendation on behalf of friends:

> Dear brother, this is a very old friend of mine. What is the point of having friends then [if not] to introduce friends to friends not yet acquainted

39 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 59, ed. Kolovou, p. 81, l. 21–30: Σπανιώτερον δὲ καὶ προσφθέγγομαι γράμμασι, τάχα μὲν ὀλιγώρῳ περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα φύσει καὶ γνώμῃ χρώμενος, τάχα δὲ καὶ ὄχλῳ πραγμάτων καὶ μακρᾷ διαστάσει κολουόμενος. Τοιοῦτος ἐγὼ τοῖς ἐμοῖς κατ᾽ ἀρετὴν παιδικοῖς, ὥστε καὶ ὅτε γράφοντες δεοίμεθά τι, μὴ διὰ τοῦτ᾽ αὐτὸ οἴου τὴν γραφὴν ἐγχαράττεσθαι, καὶ ὅτε μὴ γράφοιμεν μηδ᾽ ἀξιοῖμεν ὁτιποτοῦν, ἴσθι ὡς οἱ αὐτοί σοι βεβήκαμεν ἀκίνητοι … Εἴ τί που δεηθείη σου ὁ γραμματικὸς, ὅλῳ θυμῷ βοήθησον, ἀλλ᾽ ὅπως μὴ πάλιν ἐπιστέλλειν ἡμᾶς τούτου ἕνεκα οἰηθῇς.

> with them, but who are most familiar to ourselves, especially when they are able to render help in matters where they need it? For you are my brother in all these respects, a man of remarkable eloquence, with a sharp wit, cogent mind, of virtuous disposition, ready to help friends. I would like you to make the acquaintance of a friend of mine who is of good character, a man not without culture; make him your friend by using me as an intermediary … Ask him how we fare and what our current circumstances are and you will learn everything from a friend able to relay a more poignant account than a soul-less letter [might].[40]

Italikos reminds his correspondent of the social conventions that entitled one to expect that a measure of trust and generosity be extended to one's friends. Commenting on it in this way was a further way to implicate one's correspondent in the social logic which underwrote the letter. By deliberately joining the innate qualities which bind him and his correspondent, Italikos provides an example of the rhetoric of friendship as an almost ritual affirmation of the obligations entered into by "friends".[41] Letters of introduction, a disproportionately large share of some surviving Byzantine letter collections, offered additional incentives to cultivate an epistolographic discourse of friendship. The reasons were socially structural. The aim of Italikos' letter was to initiate the letter-carrier into the network of affiliations and alignments entered into by the correspondents.[42]

The letter of introduction saw the ideal unity of epistolary form and "friendly" content. Thus John Mauropous, another eleventh-century figure who participated in the wide epistolary network of his time, wrote to a friend, the high court judge John Xiphilinos, enjoining him to become a benefactor to a dependent of Mauropous bearing the letter in question. He explains that he wishes Xiphilinos to display the same solicitude to the letter-carrier as he had shown in a recent court case, in which he had found for his friend Mauropous, once more notwithstanding the merits of the claim:

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40 Michael Italikos, *Letters*, no. 26, ed. Gautier, p. 179, l. 1–10: <Ὁ μ>ὲν φίλος οὗτος ἀρχαῖος, φίλτατε ἀδελφέ· τὶ οὖν τὰ τῶν φίλων συνιστᾶν εἰς τοὺς μήπω μὲν ἐκείνοις φίλους, ἑαυτοῖς δὲ οἰκειοτάτους, δυναμένους δὲ βοηθεῖν οἷς οἱ φίλοι δέονται; Τυγχάνεις δὲ αὐτὸς ταῦτα πάντα ὁ ἐμὸς ἀδελφός, τὴν γλῶσσαν δεινός, τὴν σύνεσιν ὀξύς, τὸν νοῦν στιβαρός, τὴν προαίρεσιν ἀγαθός, φίλοις βοηθεῖν ἕτοιμος. Γνωρίζου τοίνυν φίλον ἐμὸν χρηστὸν τὸ ἦθος, τὴν παιδείαν οὐκ ἄμουσον, σὸν ποιησάμενος φίλον δι' ἐμοῦ μέσου … Πυνθάνου δὲ καὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων καὶ ἐν οἷς τυγχάνομεν ὄντες παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ πάντα μαθήσῃ παρὰ φίλου καὶ συμπαθέστερον λέξοντος τῆς ἀψύχου γραφῆς.

41 Mullett, "Byzantium: A Friendly Society?", p. 21. Once more, credit belongs to Mullett's insight that "the student who learns to penetrate the language and ceremonial of friendship and patronage will reach the reality of *philia* in Byzantium".

42 Tiftixoglou, "Gruppenbildungen", pp. 25–72.

> There is nothing out of place nor unfitting about encouraging you to perform some good deed … especially since the judgement has already gone against you for influencing the votes in my case by your good will towards me. For friendship adorned as it is with many and various virtues and abounding in all respects in praises, has this one and only disadvantage: when it comes to a judgement of friends it is viewed with suspicion and is not easily conceded as trustworthy, whether it be as witness or as judge.[43]

Mauropous dwells at some length on the widespread assumption that friendship skews one's judgement. He cites this as the probable cause for the proverbial characterization of friendship as "blind", a feature of the relationship for which he makes no apologies. He acknowledges that in the eyes of many, friendship could be exploited to illegitimate ends, a suggestion indirectly confirmed by Mauropous' own admission that his recent vindication at trial may have been brought about by his friend's presiding over the case. Mauropous' letter presents a world in which friends were arrayed against a society often inclined to believe the worst about them. Letters afforded friends a medium in which they might close ranks, even if only rhetorically.

It is worth asking here whether friendship could have been articulated in such obliging terms in any genre other than epistolography. Was this because letters to friends were deemed off-the-record? And yet we only know of such letters because they were gathered into 'published' collections. Might it be that epistolary rhetoric created a textual space in which socially vital relations could be negotiated? The time-honored rationale of the letter as a substitute for dialogue between friends made epistolography an effectively informal venue, even though nothing like privacy of communication is ever suggested. Social historians have long noted that a good deal of patronage in pre-modern societies was "defined by the strategic employment and representation of affective relationships".[44] The letter lent itself to the representation of such relationships. If patronage had to be construed as a personal favor to a friend, letters were ideally suited to the task. Without the presumption of some personal attachment, the conferral of favors and preferential treatment by friends might

43 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 28, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, p. 113, l. 1–p. 115, l. 22: Ἄτοπον οὐδὲν οὐδ᾽ ἀνοίκειον … πρὸς εὐεργεσίαν σε παρορμῶν … ἄλλως τε καὶ ὅτι προείληπται κατὰ σοῦ τὰ τῆς κρίσεως ὡς εὐνοίᾳ δεκάζοντος τὰς ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν τάχα ψήφους, ἐπειδὴ παντοδαποῖς ἡ φιλία κοσμουμένη καλοῖς καὶ πολλοῖς πανταχόθεν περικλυζομένη τοῖς ἐγκωμίοις, ἓν ἔχει τοῦτο μόνον ἀτύχημα· ὕποπτός ἐστι τὰς κρίσεις τῶν φιλουμένων, καὶ οὐκ εὐχερῶς αὐτῇ συγχωρεῖται τὸ ἀξιόπιστον, κἂν μαρτυρῇ, κἂν δικάζῃ.

44 For a consonant analysis of this phenomenon in Carolingian and Ottonian society, see Gilsdorf, *The Favor of Friends*, p. 43.

have quickly brought patronage out of the ideological shadows and exposed it to legal and political stress.[45] Patronage and its attendant clientelism were rendered less unseemly or ignoble by being construed as favors bestowed on friends. Carefully articulated friendship could accommodate social hierarchy while appealing to an affective symmetry.

Like most Byzantine letter-writers who could claim high ranking court officials among his "friends", Psellos rarely fails to include the deferential address κῦρ μου ("my lord") alongside appeals to φιλία.[46] A generation after Psellos, Theophylact of Ochrid could praise letter-writing by drawing a telling parallel between friends and "servants and their masters": "Blessed be God who has provided us with his bounty of good things and especially letters, through which we friends may speak to our friends and we servants may address our masters from afar."[47] Theophylact is careful to observe the boundaries separating friends from masters, even as he pairs the two in suggestive fashion. His correspondent, the recently appointed Duke of Dyrrachium, was effectively being invited to remain a "friend" and patron to Theophylact's ecclesiastical see. Theophylact's own mentor, Psellos, had similarly had occasion to write to an earlier occupant of the office, praising him for the help he offered "not just to those who came to see him in person but to those who wrote letters as well" (οὐχ ὁμιλοῦντας μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ γράφοντας). Psellos expresses confidence that the Duke is ready to do "all those things a friend must be willing to do on behalf of a friend" (ὁπόσα δεῖ φίλον ὑπὲρ φίλου ἀξιώσαντος πράττειν).[48]

Despite the often slyly humorous tone of his letters to friends, we should not be lulled into dismissing Psellos or Theophylact's statements about friendship as feigned or inauthentic. Byzantine epistolography is replete with similarly aphoristic, normative statements about the demands of friendship. Thus, in keeping with the propensity of epistolography to thematize its social logic, the fourteenth-century court intellectual Nikephoros Gregoras acknowledges the perennial dilemma posed by friendship between men of unequal rank. He cites Aristotle's recognition that friendship cannot be reduced to a single legitimate

45 Constable (*Letters and Letter-collections*, pp. 14–16) has noted the similarly prominent place assigned to friendship in western medieval letter collections, observing that letters performed "social and political function[s] alongside more affective ties based in a sense of shared temperament, intellectual interests, or common sensibility". See also Chapter 3 in this volume.

46 E.g., Michael Psellos, *Letters*, nos. 103, 228, 248, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 221–24; vol. 2, 593–94, 616–19; see Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede*, pp. 289–92.

47 Theophylact of Ohrid, *Letters*, no. 10, ed. Gautier, p. 161, l. 2–4: Εὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεὸς ὁ δοὺς ἡμῖν τά τε ἄλλα τῆς αὐτοῦ ἀγαθοχυσίας φιλοτιμήματα καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ γράμματα, δι᾽ ὧν καὶ φίλοι φίλους προσαγορεύομεν καὶ δοῦλοι δεσπόταις διὰ μακροῦ προσφθεγγόμεθα.

48 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 289, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 699, l. 1–5.

pairing, but may unite men "who are at once dissimilar and unequal, in eminence as in age":

> Aristotle, son of Nicomachus, and all those of his school do not offer one simple definition of friendship, but one that is diverse and multifaceted when broken down into its more specific categories. For [friendship] is not simply a matter of political or tribal identity, nor for that matter one of family relations and associations and all those involving equality and symmetry between the two, but also those between men at once dissimilar and unequal, whether in status or age, should also be considered friendship, that is to say between greater towards lesser or the reverse … All this might mean that it is not far-fetched to label as friendship a relationship between ourselves and someone of your stature, [since the term would be] synonymous with the underlying reality, but [would] nevertheless differentiate our [status in the] relationship.[49]

Gregoras was not simply citing a truism about friendship. He was mounting a rhetorical defense of an otherwise unequal relationship, seeking letters as surety of his correspondent's friendship: "You yourself should not cease from thinking of us even as we think of you and write to one who writes to you and be a friend to one who is a friend to you."[50] The significance of what is being negotiated in such letters has so far escaped the notice of social historians of Byzantium.

If letters by themselves could not forge a bond, a drop off in correspondence could nevertheless prompt concern. A corollary of enduring friendship was the ever-present anxiety about a friend's prolonged silence:

> Much time has elapsed, my saintly lord, without either letters from you to us, or even a short message from someone's lips reached us with news

49 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, no. 46, ed. Leone, p. 157, l. 1–p. 158, l. 13: Ἀριστοτέλης ὁ Νικομάχου καὶ ὅσοι αἱρεσιῶται τὸ [τῆς] φιλίας οὐχ ἁπλοῦν ἐκδεδώκασιν ὄνομα, ἀλλὰ πολλαπλοῦν καὶ πολλαχῇ διαφερόντως ἔχον ἐν τοῖς εἰδικωτέροις ἁπλούμενον. μὴ γὰρ ὅτι πολιτικὴν ἁπλῶς καὶ φυλετικήν, ἔτι μὴν συγγενικὴν καὶ ἑταιρικὴν καὶ ὅσαι τὴν σχέσιν ὁμοίαν καὶ ἀντιστρέφουσαν ἔχουσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁπόσοι ἀνόμοιοί τε {ἅμα} καὶ ἄνισοι, ὅσα γε κατ' ἀξίαν καὶ χρόνον, καὶ τούτων δ' εἰδέναι φιλίαν ἔπεισιν αὐτοῖς, μειζόνων δηλαδὴ πρὸς ἐλάττους καὶ τοὐναντίον … εἰ δὲ ταῦτα καὶ φιλίαν οὐκ ἂν τῶν ἀπεικότων εἴη καλεῖν τὴν μεταξὺ σχέσιν ἡμῶν τε καὶ μεγέθους τοῦ σοῦ, τῷ μὲν ὑποκειμένῳ ταὐτιζομένην, τῇ δὲ σχέσει διφορουμένην. Gregoras is alluding to Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1161b. See the discussion in Manolova, *Discourses of Science*, pp. 167–69.

50 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, no. 46, ed. Leone, p. 160, l. 75–77: σὺ δὲ μὴ λήγοις ἡμῶν μεμνημένων καὶ αὐτὸς μεμνημένος καὶ γράφοντι γράφων καὶ φιλοῦντα φιλῶν.

> about your much desired person. And to be quite honest, we have been giving it much thought as we seek the cause of this fact, for we concluded that it must be either a heavy illness, or a failure to recall our friendship, or some fault on our part, either some vain false charges against us or something done by us out of carelessness. And so I appeal to your good soul to let us know the cause of this long and perennial silence, to let me know in all honesty, so that we may be friendly to you, as well.[51]

Byzantine letter-writers can often be heard worrying aloud in their letters about lapsed friendship. The oft-repeated idea that letters could simulate a friend's presence, as expressed in formulas such as "when I receive your letters, it's as if I welcome you [in person]",[52] were meant to shore up a relationship vulnerable to distance and silence. Long periods without a letter – or worse, letters going unrequited – could signify the waning of a vital relationship. We should not be quick to dismiss protestations about a correspondent's neglect as a mere commonplace originating in rhetoric instead of reality. Such complaints stemmed from a real fear of social invisibility.[53] A flagging friendship could mean not just the loss of a single friend but exclusion from a network of potentially productive ties. Such grievances might be leavened with humor and wit. But the lightheartedness sometimes barely conceals the sharp tinge of indignation or anxiety, as already loose ties are suspected of unravelling altogether. The following rather earnest letter of the tenth century illustrates this:

> Have you, too, grown thoughtless and careless in matters concerning friendship, you who once burned with the affection of a more intense flame? In whom, then, are the ties that bind friends to be believed? Where shall we turn? Where shall we draw courage? All our hopes have proven empty … Therefore, if you should wish to give me a little breath [of hope], if you wish for us not to despair entirely, console us. You will

51 Symeon Magistros, *Letters*, no. 7, ed. Darrouzès, p. 103, l. 1–9: Χρόνος παρῆλθεν ἤδη συχνός, δέσποτα ἅγιε, καὶ οὔτε γράμματα παρὰ σοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς, οὔτε ψιλόν τι μήνυμα διὰ γλώττης κατέλαβε τὰ περὶ τῆς πεποθημένης σου ζωῆς ἀπαγγέλλον ἡμῖν· καὶ νὴ τὴν ἀλήθειαν, πολλοῖς περιεπέσομεν λογισμοῖς τὴν αἰτίαν τοῦ πράγματος ἐκζητοῦντες, εἴτε γὰρ νόσον βαρεῖαν ἐκρίναμεν εἶναι, ἢ λήθην τῶν φιλικῶν, ἢ καὶ ἁμάρτημά τι ἡμέτερον ἢ μάτην ἡμῶν κατηγορηθὲν ἢ ἐξ ἀπροσεξίας παρ' ἡμῶν γενόμενον. Αἰτοῦμεν οὖν τὴν ἀγαθήν σου ψυχὴν γνωρίσαι ἡμῖν τὴν αἰτίαν τῆς μακρᾶς ταύτης καὶ πολυχρονίου σιγῆς, γνωρίσαι δὲ μετὰ τῆς ἀληθείας, ὥσπερ καὶ φίλον σοι ποιεῖν.

52 John Apokaukos, *Letters*, no. 52, ed. Bees, p. 108, l. 5: καὶ γράμματά σου δεχόμενος, σὲ δοκεῖν δέχεσθαι.

53 On the apprehensiveness engendered by long silence, see Mullett, "Writing in Early Medieval Byzantium".

> offer us consolation, if you should wish to make us a gift of receiving sweet writing from your own hand. For by doing this and offering some explanation for the cause of so much silence you will also reassure us that we were rashly contemplating inappropriate thoughts, which we will have as solace in the future, as well, if something like this should happen again. You see how much putting your hand to writing will profit [us]?[54]

It is easy to dismiss the recurring expressions of fear and apprehension as formulaic. But commonplace concerns are not baseless by virtue of being frequently invoked. And the equally formulaic reassurances from addressees had what we might characterize as a ritually binding quality.

Adapted to host the ceremonial of patronage and social networking both among and between differing ranks, it remains to be determined whether the language of medieval Greek epistolography could also accommodate what we might deem as more profoundly affective relations. Bearing in mind that even our generous bounty of surviving letters represents a fraction of any one author's correspondence, it is worth asking how much demand there would have been for copies of letters which spoke to highly individual relationships.[55] Still, at least some of the friendships reflected in the extant letter collections are characterized by the expression of strongly emotional bonds, a shared temperament, and common formative experiences, like school or service; in short, the still common coordinates of friendship. The emotional or psychological aspects of such letters often seem veiled by levity, irony, or wit, as the following letter by Michael Psellos reveals:

> Dearest brother, how can you go on living not seeing your most honorable friend, whom you were accustomed not just to hold dear but to breathe in as well? For my part I am deprived of the better part of life (by your great love, that is the truth!), unable to look upon you or my other friends and companions … nevertheless I subsist on books. For having collected every book [I need], I planted myself in their midst and finding myself

54 John of Mount Latros, *Letters*, no. 2, ed. Darrouzès, p. 212, l. 1–13: Καὶ σὺ χαῦνος τὰ εἰς φιλίαν καὶ ἀνειμένος, ὁ πρὶν φλογὸς σφοδροτέρας τῷ φίλτρῳ περικαιόμενος; Καὶ ἐν τίνι λοιπὸν πιστευτέον τὰ τῶν φίλων; Ποῦ ποτε ἀπίδωμεν. Ποῦ ποτε θαρρήσομεν; Πᾶσαι αἱ ἡμῶν ἐλπίδες εἰς κενὸν ὤφθησαν … Εἰ οὖν βούλει με μικρὸν ἀναπνεῦσαι, εἰ οὖν βούλει με μὴ παντελῶς ἀπογνῶναι, παρηγόρησον· παρηγορήσεις δέ, εἰ θελήσεις χαρίσαι μοι τὴν χεῖρά σου πρὸς τὸ προσλαβεῖν γλυκεῖάν σου γραφήν. τοῦτο γὰρ ποιῶν καὶ ἀπολογήσῃ τὸ αἴτιον τῆς τοσαύτης σιωπῆς καὶ βεβαιώσεις ὡς εἰκῇ λογισμοὺς μὴ ἁρμόζοντας ἐλογιζόμεθα, ὃ καὶ εἰς τὸ μέλλον ἕξομεν εἰς παραμυθίαν, εἴ ποτέ τι γένηται τοιοῦτον. Ὁρᾷς ὅσον ὠφλήσει τὸ τὴν χεῖρά σου τεῖναι ἐπὶ γραφήν;

55 See Papaioannou, "Fragile Literature".

> as in a meadow full of flowers, I manage to harvest and cut whatever I want from each. But this meadow is soul-less, unlike the living, breathing, flourishing, sustainable meadow formed by you.[56]

Psellos' occasionally precious expression notwithstanding, such descriptions may well have sought to create a fitting verbal tribute to the experience of friendship. The contrivance allowed the letter-writer to couch his earnestness in rhetorically admissible pronouncements. But we should not conclude that rhetorically mannered testimonials to friendship precluded real feeling.

Among our epistolary collections are numerous letters which suggest that friends sometimes wrote for apparently no other reason than to feel close to one another. Letters were an outlet to commiserate, often through wry humor and teasing sarcasm.[57] Thus a letter by Michael Italikos to his former pupil and celebrated court poet, Theodore Prodromos, illustrates how the very theme of perfect friendship could be turned on its head, as the author ironically declares letter-writing between genuine friends redundant. Having anticipated Prodromos' complaint that his former teacher had not sent a letter in an unforgivably long time, Italikos turns the tables on his correspondent by exploiting the ancient aphorism of the friend as "another self" in order to argue that no real separation exists between the two friends since being "other selves" to one another, they effectively inhabit each other's existence. What need is there, writes Italikos with obvious delight, for letter-writing between friends who experience the world with such profound mutual empathy that each may be said to have witnessed, tasted, and felt all that the other has? Fearing lest Prodromos take his declarations to heart, however, Italikos drops the clever charade and assures his correspondent that his estimate of letter-writing has in no way diminished. Nestled in the closing section of the letter is a passing reference to the letter-carrier, who bears a message supposedly too tedious to set down in writing. The letter closes with typically amicable sarcasm by exhorting Prodromos not to invoke the very maxims about friendship Italikos had pretended to cite as an excuse for not replying. Italikos illustrates the extent

56 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 504, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 930, l. 1–p. 931, l. 11: Ἀδελφὲ φίλτατε, πῶς ζῇς μὴ ὁρῶν τὸν φίλον σου τὸν ὑπέρτιμον, ὃν εἴωθας οὐ φιλεῖν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀναπνεῖν; Ἐγὼ δὲ τὸ πλεῖον ἀφῄρημαι τῆς ζωῆς (μὰ τὴν μεγάλην σου ἀγάπην!), μήτε σὲ ἔχων ὁρᾶν, μήτε τοὺς ἄλλους ἡμῶν φίλους καὶ συντρόφους … Ὅμως ζῶ ἐπὶ τοῖς βιβλίοις· πάντα γὰρ συλλεξάμενος, ἐν μέσῳ τούτων ἐμαυτὸν ἵδρυσα· καὶ ὥσπερ ἐν πολυανθεῖ λειμῶνι γενόμενος, ἄλλο τι ἐξ ἄλλου καρποῦμαι καὶ δρέπομαι. Ἀλλ' ἄψυχος ὁ λειμὼν οὗτος, οὐχ οἷος ὁ παρ' ὑμῖν, ὁ ζῶν καὶ ἔμπνους, καὶ ἀρτιμελὴς καὶ βιώσιμος.

57 Bernard, "Humor in Byzantine Letters".

to which the discourse of friendship could be gently mocked in the very same letters which sustained it.

Friends could afford to mock one another, but they also mourned together through letters of condolence marked by an almost lyrical sense of shared sorrow. While many Byzantine letters of consolation were no doubt motivated by social obligation, just as many give voice to a compassion which suggests genuine empathy.[58] As A.R. Littlewood has noted in his survey of elaborately wrought medieval Greek letters of consolation, "for a Byzantine, rhetoric and emotion were not incompatible".[59] Yet the conspicuous aesthetics of Byzantine epistolography have contributed to skepticism surrounding the authenticity of the friendships portrayed in the letters. Among modern readers, at least, letters addressed to friends generate an expectation of access to an otherwise private side of the letter-writer's life and mind. When writing to a friend who presumably enjoys our confidence, we are assumed to shed our public persona in favor of a disarming candor. There are few such unguarded moments in Byzantine epistolography, much less anything which might have caused embarrassment had it circulated among one's peers, though our epistolary corpora may be unrepresentative in this respect. Of course, such a perspective already assumes a great deal about both friendship and letter-writing. The point is made by Mullett when she says that "Byzantines did not use their emotions in their relations of friendship or couch their expressions of friendship in emotional terms".[60] What then are we to make of the ardor with which friendship is invoked in so many Byzantine letters? Mullett may be right in saying that we should not be looking for purely affective attachments. But we should also resist the temptation to parse which friendships were grounded in feelings and which on favors; or to assume that the latter necessarily precluded the former. Every letter either presupposing or professing friendship traded on the assumption that "friends were allies and supporters as much as kindred spirits".[61]

Like every other form of social discourse, that of epistolary friendship underwent evolution. Perhaps not coincidentally, more women begin to enter the rolls of letter-writers in this period. Not insignificantly, a number of letters by Demetrios Kydones, an important intellectual figure of the Palaiologan age,

58 Littlewood, "The Byzantine Letter of Consolation"; Sarres, *Η βυζαντινή παραμυθητική επιστολή*.

59 Littlewood, "The Byzantine Letter of Consolation", p. 35.

60 Mullett, "Byzantium: A Friendly Society?", p. 16.

61 Kazhdan, *People and Power*, p. 28.

were to a female friend, the empress Helena Kantakouzene (1333/4–97).[62] It has been noted that his correspondence with her spanned approximately half a century, leading one scholar to conclude that she was “a lifelong friend”.[63] Was an epistolary friendship between a man and woman, even one subsumed in the identities of a scholar and his patroness, as likely in preceding periods? Although we can be quite certain that women of élite status had always corresponded, we find more evidence of their epistolary friendships preserved in the letter collections of this period. Thus, the high-born woman Theodora Raoulaina conducted a regular correspondence in the thirteenth century with the patriarch Gregory of Cyprus. While the letters to her from him make no overt mention of friendship (which may in fact speak to the strength of their bond), one is led to infer from their contents that his regard for her exceeded that normally due a patroness.[64]

We may also note a greater accent on intimacy, even between ranks, beginning with the emperor. We thus find Manuel II Palaiologos (1350–1425) among the authors of letter collections from this period. Many of the letters selected for inclusion in his ‘published’ correspondence often seem less from an emperor to a subject than from one friend to another, as Manuel’s letters, written during his long futile sojourn in western Europe seeking aid against the Turks, to his former teacher Chrysoloras suggest. Similarly, a letter to a certain Constantine Asanes, written while Manuel was campaigning in Asia Minor in the winter of 1391, appears motivated by nothing more than a desire to satisfy a friend’s wish for news.[65]

Vital as the avowal of friendship may have been to epistolary discourse in Byzantium, we should nevertheless be wary of extrapolating from the letters wider social practices.[66] Epistolography was a stylized medium whose eclectic filters kept out the kind of incidental detail which might have given us friendship in the round. If letters were the occasion *par excellence* for giving voice to ideas about friendship, they were also likely to elicit a more fluent formulation of friendship than most people had need of in the course of their daily lives. We therefore risk mistaking something well-articulated with something widely assumed. The prominence of friendship in our letter collections should not be confused with an index of how actual relations were conducted outside of the

62 Kianka, “The Letters of Demetrios Kydones”, p. 163; see also Tinnefeld, “Georgios Philosophos”; id., “Freundschaft und *Paideia*”.

63 Kianka, “The Letters of Demetrios Kydones”, p. 62.

64 Kotzabassi, “Scholarly Friendship”.

65 Manuel II Palaiologos, *Letters*, no. 18, ed. and trans. Dennis, pp. 54–57.

66 Dennis, “The Byzantines as Revealed in Their Letters”.

rarefied venue of epistolary exchange. By their very nature, letters afforded an opportunity to *perform* friendship.

Letter-writers were accustomed from long training in rhetoric to draw on whatever was likely to achieve the end they had in mind. Friendship recurs in the letters with such regularity as *the* subject most apt to motivate the correspondent's will to act. For that reason, perhaps, Byzantine epistolary discourse about friendship remained firmly anchored in the social sphere. *Amicitia spiritualis*, a religiously inflected ideal of friendship which runs through so much western medieval epistolography, makes only infrequent appearances in Byzantine letters; this despite the large number of clerics among the authors of surviving Byzantine letter-collections.[67] And while it is unlikely that we can attribute the difference to any single cause, a more secular-minded epistolary discourse surrounding friendship may well reflect the social pragmatism which underwrote so much Byzantine letter-writing.[68] This will seem paradoxical, given Byzantine epistolography's reputation for aloofness from its surrounding reality. But the role assigned to friendship in Byzantine letters invites us to reconsider the social utility of both in Byzantium.

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67 Unsurprisingly, friendship arising from a common commitment to Christ appears more often among monastic letter-writers, cf., e.g., Nikephoros Ouranos, *Letters*, no. 9, ed. Darrouzès, p. 222, l. 3–4: τὸ πνευματικὸν ἐκεῖνο τῆς ἀγάπης πῦρ, ὃ τοῖς ἀμφοτέρων ἀνῆπται ψυχαῖς διὰ τοῦ κοινοῦ πρὸς Χριστὸν ἔρωτος.

68 Konstan, "Problems in the History of Christian Friendship".

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CHAPTER 11

Epistolary Communication: Rituals and Codes

Floris Bernard

1 Introduction

Byzantine letters are increasingly seen as an essential part of the flow of communication in the Byzantine Empire, rather than merely as an irrelevant play on forms.[1] Letters, however rhetorically elaborate they may be, serve as a medium for exchanging information, maintaining relationships, and conducting business of all sorts.[2] Put simply, letters are the medium through which a sender (the letter-writer) transmits a message to the receiver (the recipient of the letter). Of course, matters are more complex than that, and these complexities will be discussed in this essay, not as factors obfuscating clear communication, but as fundamental and defining features of Byzantine letter exchange.

Gerd Althoff has pointed to the non-verbal elements of public events in the Middle Ages that produce meaning and establish communication: recurring acts and gestures that reinforce existing social hierarchies, and for which we are inclined to use the word "rituals".[3] With this in mind, we can approach letter exchange as a more multi-layered and socially intricate kind of communication. We can also see it as a ritualized performance consisting of a sequence of textual signals and non-verbal gestures that function in a partly symbolic universe.[4] Moreover, letter exchange is not only regulated by literary, but also by ethical and behavioral rules. These aspects of letter exchange, at the intersection between text and social context, will be focused upon here.

I will limit myself to letters of the middle Byzantine period. I will also mostly be concerned with how communication is represented and mediated in the

1 Mullett, "Writing", p. 183; Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede*, p. 39.

2 For general theoretical comments, see Markopoulos, "Επικοινωνιακή λειτουργία". For letters as part of communication in Late Antiquity, see Gillett, "Communication in Late Antiquity". For an overview of scholarship on medieval communication, see Mostert, "New Approaches?".

3 Althoff, "Demonstration und Inszenierung" and id., "Zur Bedeutung symbolischer Kommunikation".

4 The term "ritual" is used in an inclusive sense here; see the definition of "ritual" as a "voluntary performance of appropriately patterned behavior to symbolically effect or participate in the serious life", in Rothenbuhler, *Ritual Communication*, p. 27. For Byzantine letters as "ritualized communication" see Riehle, "Rhetorik, Ritual", p. 265.

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letters themselves. There is, to begin with, little external evidence on Byzantine epistolary communication. There are some images in manuscripts, historiographical testimonies,[5] and passages in novels,[6] but these are concerned with types of letters (diplomatic or military missives, love letters, etc.) that are not representative of most of the letters that we still have and that we try to understand. On the other hand, Byzantine letters have the tendency to elaborate upon their own conditions of communication and the rituals of reception.[7] But they do so through metaphors and idealized images. One could legitimately ask what the relationship is between this literary image of letter exchange and the real historical circumstances of letter exchange, or, the *Briefsituation*.[8] This is compounded by the fact that extant letters were mostly produced by men wishing to impart an intellectualist self-image.[9] Typically, at some point in their career, they collected (and adapted) their own letters with intentions that may be at variance with their intentions at the moment of the first writing. Hence, what I will present here is bound to partly reflect a literary representation, and it will be an analysis of rhetoric as well as a description of a cultural practice.

2 Multimedia Communication

Letter exchange involves more than just written texts. Epistolary communication was complemented and enhanced by non-written and even non-verbal signs. "It [the letter] was written, oral, material, visual and it had its own ceremony."[10] Two media of communication are important in this regard: oral communication through the bearer, and material communication through gifts.

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5 For these two kinds of external sources, see chiefly Mullett, "Diplomacy"; for illustrated manuscripts depicting letter exchange see also Chapter 14 in this volume.

6 See Agapitos, "Writing and Reading" and Chapter 15, pp. 412–23 in this volume.

7 Mullett, "Writing", p. 179.

8 For the term *Briefsituation*, referring to the concrete "historical" circumstances that led someone to write a letter, see Koskenniemi, *Studien*, p. 53; Thraede, *Grundzüge*, p. 3. A more inclusive use of the term (including material circumstances of writing, the conditions of reception, etc.) is discussed in Conring, *Hieronymus als Briefschreiber*, pp. 105–24.

9 Riehle, "Rhetorik, Ritual", pp. 272–75.

10 Mullett, "Writing", p. 183.

2.1 *Bearer*

The letter bearer, or messenger, is a crucial component of epistolary communication.[11] His primary function was very practical. In the absence of an official postal system, letters were carried by private acquaintances of letter writers, or sometimes by people who demanded money for this service. This was an unreliable system, and we often hear about delayed or failed communication due to bearers.[12] Letter writers often justify their silence because they had not found a suitable bearer.[13]

But bearers are more than simply a practical necessity. They play their own role in the rituals and conventions of epistolary communication, and they are an important link in the social network of letter writers and recipients. To begin with, it is well known and amply documented that bearers orally communicated parts of the message that were left out in the letter.[14] Emphasizing that letters were a "deconcretized" genre, Gustav Karlsson asserted that the "real" message was entrusted to the bearer.[15] This view is echoed by many studies, connecting this to a perceived paucity of concrete historical information in letters. Margaret Mullett, however, is more inclined to view letter and bearer as complementary to each other, "both bearing the same message but concentrating on different aspects of it".[16] And it is now more generally accepted that Byzantine letters did include details from everyday life.[17]

One letter of John Mauropous is customarily cited to show the emptiness of letters as opposed to the relevance of the oral message: Mauropous states that letters are superfluous when one has an eloquent bearer.[18] But upon closer inspection, the juxtaposition in this particular letter may simply be a device to enhance the recommendation of the bearer, demonstrating Mauropous' confidence in him. In fact, letters present varied ways in which written and oral communication complement each other.

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11 See Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial*, pp. 17–18; Tomadakis, *Ἐπιστολογραφία*, pp. 68–79; Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede*, p. 39; Mullett, "Writing", p. 181; Mullett, *Theophylact*, pp. 34–36.

12 See the testimonies gathered in Tomadakis, *Ἐπιστολογραφία*, pp. 72–76.

13 Leo of Synada, *Letters*, no. 24, ed. and trans. Vinson, pp. 40–41; Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 366, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 771; Theophylact of Ochrid, *Letters*, no. 52, ed. and trans. Gautier, pp. 302–05; Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, no. 45, ed. Kolovou, pp. 61–62.

14 Tomadakis, *Ἐπιστολογραφία*, pp. 76–77.

15 Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial*, pp. 17–18.

16 Mullett, "Writing", p. 181.

17 Mullett, "Classical Tradition", p. 81; Magdalino, "Literary Perception".

18 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 2, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 44–47, esp. l. 2–3.

When Michael Psellos weighs the advantages of both, he concludes that oral speech may be more powerful, but written letters are more precise.[19] In other words, they both have their advantages, and ideal communication consists of both. Mauropous expresses his joy at seeing the messenger, "having his hand full of long letters and his tongue full of stories".[20] Letter writers often refer to epistolary conventions forbidding letters from discussing or narrating matters at length, so that messengers are supposed to provide the details of the issue at hand. Mauropous states that it is burdensome (φορτικόν) to explain everything: the bearer will instead expound the matter at length.[21] Theophylact of Ochrid promises that the bearer will tell more about his problems "beyond the letter",[22] implying that the oral message is complementary to the written one. Nicholas Mystikos was informed of his friend's health by the bearer, while his friend's letter seems to have contained general remarks on human life and fragility.[23] In another letter, he states that the messengers will "tell" everything that has happened, while his letter merely "announces".[24] Leo of Synada tells his friend, Michael Magistros, only the most essential information about his travels to Rome, urging him to ask the bearer for details.[25] When Psellos refers to the things he is accustomed to saying to his correspondent, he considers this as too self-evident to be put down on paper; hence, he leaves this to the messenger to say.[26] The bearer thus typically takes care of the narrative, concrete side of the message, whereas the letters themselves rather express the emotional side. They give voice to the expectations and circumstances of the relationship between sender and recipient, and are limited to a measured amount of precious literary enjoyment.[27]

Messengers were also a matter of trust and confidentiality. In a letter of Theodore Daphnopates to the *logothetes of the dromos*, Daphnopates merely

19 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 354, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, pp. 756–57, esp. l. 1–5.

20 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 9, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 62–63, esp. l. 6–7: μεστὴν δὲ τὴν γλῶτταν καὶ τὸ στόμα φέρων διηγημάτων.

21 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 64, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 170–75, esp. l. 41–43.

22 Theophylact of Ochrid, *Letters*, no. 86, ed. and trans. Gautier, pp. 452–55, esp. l. 24: ὑπὲρ τὸ γράμμα.

23 Nicholas Mystikos, *Letters*, no. 182, eds. and trans. Jenkins/Westerink, pp. 512–13, esp. l. 3–11.

24 Nicholas Mystikos, *Letters*, no. 6, eds. and trans. Jenkins/Westerink, pp. 38–39, l. 24–25: διηγήσονται for the bearers, ἀπαγγελεῖ for the letter.

25 Leo of Synada, *Letters*, no. 2, ed. and trans. Vinson, pp. 4–5, esp. l. 24–25. See also Grünbart, "Ferngespräche", pp. 30–31, who remarks that Leo's letters are in fact rich in detailed information.

26 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 98, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 212, esp. l. 17–20.

27 Mullett, "Tradition", p. 82.

says that he has some queries; the bearer, adept in conversation, will transmit those queries, and will also bring the answers back to Daphnopates.[28] Here, the letter serves as a guarantee of the trustworthiness of the bearer and as an introduction to the issue at hand, but the actual transmission of the message is entirely left to the bearer. Sometimes, bearers were entrusted with messages that were too confidential or too delicate to be put down on paper.[29] Conversely, they were sometimes entrusted with important information because they were not too clever and were less likely to act on their own behalf.[30]

Bearers do not only transmit messages: they interpret them, enliven them, frame them attractively or convincingly. Bearers can be mediators, power-brokers, and diplomats, fully entrenched in the sender's network.[31] Mauropous expresses his joy at finding a good messenger, who has himself seen (αὐτόπτης) and heard (αὐτήκοος) Mauropous' situation, and is thus best placed to explain this in detail.[32] Michael Italikos says that the bearer will tell his worries in a more sympathetic way than a lifeless letter can, using the motif of the bearer as "living letter",[33] a motif that has a long pedigree.[34] Messengers appear as very knowledgeable about the issue at hand, be it administrative, ecclesiastical, or of a more general nature, and they are expected to present the sender's case eloquently.

Obviously, the messenger played an important role during the reception of the letter. The letter-writer often refers to him only with the demonstrative pronoun οὗτος ("this man here"). This extratextual reference makes clear that the messenger is present when the recipient reads the letter. Frequently, the recipient is asked to offer protection to the messenger (often a pupil of the sender), whom the sender recommends. Many letters thus initiate or maintain not a one-to-one relationship, but in fact a triangular relationship, and the medium (the bearer) becomes part of the message itself.

2.2 *Gifts*

Gifts are a common feature of Byzantine letter exchange. The list of gifts compiled by Apostolos Karpozilos gives us an idea of the great variety of goods that

28 Theodore Daphnopates, *Letters*, no. 21, eds. and trans. Darrouzès/Westerink, pp. 178–79.
29 Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial*, p. 17.
30 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 228, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, pp. 593–94, esp. l. 7–11.
31 See Trisoglio, "La lettera", pp. 311–317 and Novembri, "I latori", with examples from Basil of Caesarea. For Byzantine letters, this aspect is rather overlooked.
32 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 65, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 174–75.
33 Michael Italikos, *Letters*, no. 26, ed. Gautier, pp. 179–80, esp. l. 8–13.
34 Mullet, "Writing", p. 181.

accompanied letters.[35] Horses, fruit, fish, meat, wine, cheese, flowers, perfume were all sent along with letters. Gifts bring with them their own codes and rituals, and they have their own function in the social relationship between sender and recipient. There is the predictable chain of first offering a gift, with all necessary humility and self-effacement, and then the expressions of gratitude for the gift. As Alexander Riehle observes, the lending and borrowing of books also implied a sequence of ritualized gestures: request, praise for the book, thanks and expressions of joy.[36]

Gifts, as Margaret Mullett pointed out, add an extra-literal experience to letter exchange; they confirm and intensify a personal relationship.[37] Dmitrij Chernoglazov has recently explored the representation of gifts in letters, investigating the "epistolary etiquette" concerning gifts.[38] Gifts ought to be appreciated not because of their material, but because of their symbolic value.[39] Therefore, many letters are concerned with the symbolic interpretation of gifts.[40] Gifts are meant to represent virtues, or to represent the friend himself. Various foodstuffs take on an allegorical meaning, while their number can also carry a hidden signification. This often develops into a game, in which the gift serves as a riddle that the recipient has to solve. Epistolary relationships are represented as being measured by letters alone, and especially by the intensity of friendship that is expressed there, not by the material value of gifts. Hence, gifts are ostensibly held in contempt, and the friend should have sent more words instead.[41] Psellos typically protests: "Make the fish smaller, my dear friend, and your letter longer!"[42] And when receiving truffles from his protector *caesar* Doukas, he first praises them, but then reacts: "But what do I care about the gifts? I am satisfied, instead of anything else, with your little letter and your intimate way of addressing me."[43] Thus, by inverting the expressions of gratitude that we would expect, letter writers subtly breach normal conventions, emphasizing the exclusive nature of their friendship.

35 Karpozilos, "Realia X–XII c." and id., "Realia XIII–XV c.".

36 Riehle, "Rhetorik, Ritual", p. 268. See also Karpozilos, "Books and Bookmen" and id., "Realia X–XII c.", pp. 31–32.

37 Mullett, *Theophylact,* pp. 32–34; ead., "Writing", pp. 182–83.

38 Chernoglazov, "Drei Fische".

39 See also Karpozilos, "Realia X–XII c.", p. 20 and Mullett, *Theophylact*, p. 33.

40 See also Riehle, "Rhetorik, Ritual", pp. 266–67.

41 See also Bernard, "Greet Me with Words".

42 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 204, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 546, l. 18–19: Σμίκρυνον, ὦ μακάριε, τὸν ἰχθῦν, καὶ μάκρυνον τὴν ἐπιστολήν.

43 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 45, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 105, l. 29–30: Ἀλλὰ τί μοι τὰ δῶρα; Ἀρκεῖ μοι ἀντὶ παντὸς τὸ γραμμάτιον καὶ ἡ συνήθης σου προσαγόρευσις.

While many gifts are quite inapposite to the content of the letter, some letters are completely tailored to the gift. Eustathios of Thessaloniki uses gifts of fruits as an occasion to compose extended *ekphraseis*.[44] Some letters dispense with all symbolic and rhetorical pretension and directly reflect a thriving exchange of goods. Let us not forget that letter writers are often important economic contact points in the province. In letters of Michael Choniates, for example, we find lists of "gifts" that look rather like consignment bills.[45]

We do not hear much about how and when exactly gifts were handed over or received. When Eustathios gives a basket of peaches, he instructs his friend that the letter should be read before unveiling the basket.[46] In any case, the actual use of the gift (or possibly the re-giving of gifts) is overshadowed by the emotional response to, and the symbolic interpretation of, gifts.

3 Reception of Letters

Scholars have increasingly begun to consider the reading of letters as a public or semi-public performative event, regulated by ceremony and rituals. "Reception" is thus a more apt term to describe the range of responses to letters. The initial impetus was given by an article by Margaret Mullett,[47] who followed up on this aspect in subsequent publications.[48]

It would be wrong to suppose that the reception of each Byzantine letter followed the same protocol or even that there existed a fixed set of rules, written or unwritten. The spatial context in which the letter was received, the social makeup of the audience, and the degree of intimacy between correspondents, could vary greatly. Nevertheless, we may observe that the reception of letters involved a habitual sequence of gestures of which each had its own significance. Perhaps the most concise and revealing description of the reception of a letter may be found in the romance *Libistros and Rhodamne*, when the heroine receives a letter from her lover. She "reaches out, takes the letter, loosens its fastening, / unrolls it, sees it, reads what is written on it".[49]

44 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, nos. 1 and 3, ed. Kolovou, pp. 3–5, 7–9.

45 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 84, ed. Kolovou, pp. 112–13.

46 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, no. 1, ed. Kolovou, pp. 3–5.

47 Mullett, "Writing".

48 Mullett, "Diplomacy"; ead., *Theophylact*, pp. 31–43. See also Grünbart, "Byzantinische Briefkultur", pp. 121–24.

49 *Libistros and Rhodamne*, ed. Agapitos, vv. 1528–29: ἁπλώνει, ἐπαίρνει τὸ χαρτίν, ἔλυσε τὸν δεσμόν του, / ἀποτυλίσσει, βλέπει το, τὰ γράφει ἀναγινώσκει. See Agapitos, "Writing, Reading",

The first phase in the reception of the letter was the arrival of the bearer. A letter of Eustathios of Thessaloniki to Nikephoros Komnenos is one of the very few that mention this.[50] Eustathios writes that he was having lunch when somebody knocked on the door. He recognized the visitor as the bearer of a letter from his friend. He opened the door and welcomed him. He took the letter in his hands, unrolled it, and read it, but we do not hear if the messenger was in any way present at this reading. It is important to note that Eustathios depicts a thoroughly literary scene, alluding to a passage in Aristophanes' *Ploutos* (v. 1097).

The delivery of the letter, when the recipient takes the letter in his hands, is a crucial moment. The images in the Madrid Skylitzes depicting letter exchange almost always focus on the delivery of the letter rather than the writing or the reading.[51] In letters, it often triggers a powerful emotional reaction. A phrase along the lines of "when I was handed your letter, I greatly rejoiced", often occurs in Byzantine letters.[52]

At the moment of delivery, the address inscribed on the outside of the letter played an important role, because it inaugurated the epistolary encounter by announcing the sender's identity. Eustathios of Thessaloniki first read an inscription (τίτλος) identifying the writer before he unfolded and read the letter.[53] When Michael Choniates finds that no name of the sender is inscribed (ἐπιγεγραμμένον) on the outside (ἔξωθεν) of the letter, he playfully tries to guess the identity of the anonymous sender.[54] Choniates himself offended Euthymios Tornikes because he had sent a letter to Euthymios' friends, without including on the outside an inscription to one of them in particular.[55] Choniates uses the words ἐπίγραμμα and ἐπιγραφή to refer to these addresses, implying that they functioned as inscriptions, belonging to the physical letter, but separated from the main text of it. The ancient phrase "A greets B" may have been replaced by this inscription.[56] Of course, the seal also announced the sender's identity and validated the letter.[57]

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p. 130, from which I have also taken the translation. See ibid., p. 143 for a similar event in Theodore Prodromos' novel *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*.

50 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, no. 15, ed. Kolovou, pp. 53–54.

51 Mullett, "Writing", p. 172. See also Chapter 14 in this volume.

52 See, for example, Nikephoros Ouranos, *Letters*, no. 5, ed. Darrouzès, p. 219, l. 7; John Tzetzes, *Letters*, no. 85, ed. Leone, p. 126, l. 2.

53 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, no. 46, ed. Kolovou, pp. 127–28.

54 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 102, ed. Kolovou, p. 153, l. 2–6.

55 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 113, ed. Kolovou, pp. 184–89, esp. p. 185, l. 52 (ἐπιγραφή) and l. 60 (ἐπίγραμμα).

56 See Grünbart, "Ferngespräche", pp. 33–34.

57 Mullett, "Writing", p. 183.

Simply receiving a letter and recognizing the sender's identity was already part of the message. Eustathios was reminded of a friend's problem when he received the letter (and, it is understood, recognized his friend's name on the outside), before the actual reading.[58] A letter of Nicholas Mystikos describes how he was handed a letter, and he rejoiced, before unfolding the letter (ἀνάπτυξις), because he knew that his friend had safely arrived.[59] Only upon reading the letter was Nicholas saddened, because he learned of his friend's troubles.

At this stage, the external appearance of the letter could be significant. We find Leo of Synada offended not only because a letter sent to him bore no indication of sender or addressee, but also because, he indignantly remarks, it looked like "a bare and lean scrap of a letter – it was more like a sliver – not folded".[60] Conversely, Michael Choniates describes how he received a "fistful" of letters from his friends, and the considerable weight made him look forward to the joys of reading them.[61]

A subsequent step in the reception of the letter is the opening of the envelope (very scarcely attested) and the breaking of the seal.[62] Despite the fact that seals are attested materially so abundantly, letters are remarkably silent about them. Leo of Synada refers to the opening of a seal (σφραγῖδα λῦσαι) before his letter can begin to be read.[63] Symeon Magistros says how he was first worried about his friend until he held the letter in his hands, again, recognizing his friend's name and thus notified that he was alive. He then "unloosened a shackle", referring to the breaking of the seal, but also including a literary allusion to the unloosening of the bridal girdle.[64]

Next, the letter is opened. This act is described as ἀνάπτυξις, referring to the unrolling of a scroll, or, perhaps more frequently, the opening up of the folded sheet of parchment. No Byzantine letter has survived in its original state, but mostly, it seems, letters consisted of a folded or rolled up single sheet of paper

58 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, no. 14, ed. Kolovou, pp. 51–52.

59 Nicholas Mystikos, *Letters*, no. 178, eds. and trans. Westerink/Jenkins, pp. 506–09.

60 Leo of Synada, *Letters*, no. 28, ed. and trans. Vinson, pp. 44–45, l. 2–3: Ψιλὸν καὶ ξηρόν, ὡς εἰπεῖν, κόμμα ἢ τεμάχιον γραφῆς ἐδεξάμην, μήτ' ἐπτυγμένον. Translation from ibid., p. 45.

61 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 112, ed. Kolovou, p. 181, l. 39–42.

62 On seals and envelopes, see Tomadakis, *Ἐπιστολογραφία*, p. 60, with references to early and late letter writers.

63 Leo of Synada, *Letters*, no. 39, ed. and trans. Vinson, pp. 64–65, l. 5–6. See also Grünbart, "Ferngespräche", p. 34.

64 Symeon Magistros, *Letters*, no. 89, ed. Darrouzès, pp. 150–51. See Papaioannou, "Glasort des Textes", pp. 329–33.

or parchment.[65] For exceptionally long letters, several sheets could be glued together: at the end of a long letter, Michael Choniates says that he is going to stop writing, because otherwise he will need to glue another sheet to his letter.[66] He also describes how a letter of a friend got wet along the way, so that the folded paper was caked into one lump and the letter could not be opened.[67]

The unfolding marks the transition to the real literary enjoyment. Eustathios mentions in two letters (both already mentioned above) the verb "unfolding" (ἀναπτύσσω) as a step in receiving the letter, after ushering in the bearer or recognizing the identity of the sender, and before the actual reading.[68] Upon unfolding the letters of his friends, Michael Choniates is transported into a wholly different world, a paradise where the voices of his friends reach him directly.[69]

After the unfolding of the letter, the actual reading begins. Here, we again enter a grey area: did the recipient read the letter silently and in private? Did someone read the letter aloud in front of him and others? Did this happen in a household setting, or in a circle of friends? The letters themselves seldom dwell upon the practicalities of reading, and the accounts of the acts of writing and reading are far from unambiguous. I present here a very typical example of a letter in which the writing and reading of letters involve different modes and senses. It is a short letter by Nikephoros Ouranos to Leo Sakellarios:

> Well then, I liberate my hand from fear, I unfasten the shackles of my tongue and I urge the Muse to have confidence in you. As you see, I speak usual words, simple and common, and yet hortatory, to say that I am healthy and business is good, and that I wish that the same applies to you. So, speak forth without fear and let your letters come more frequently to me, so that we can enjoy each other in this way too, since we are bereaved of eye-to-eye encounters.[70]

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65 Mullett, "Writing", p. 182 is skeptical whether one leaf could contain one letter, but I see no problem with this for the majority of Byzantine letters.

66 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 111, ed. Kolovou, p. 180, l. 276–77: ἑτέρου χάρτου συγκολλήσεως δεησόμεθα.

67 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 117, ed. Kolovou, p. 195, l. 2–11.

68 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, nos. 15 and 46, ed. Kolovou p. 53, l. 10 and p. 127, l. 7.

69 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 112, ed. Kolovou, p. 182, l. 42–50.

70 Nikephoros Ouranos, *Letters*, no. 17, ed. Darrouzès, p. 225: Ἰδού σοι καὶ τὴν χεῖρα τοῦ δέους ἀνίεμεν καὶ τὰ τῆς γλώττης δεσμὰ λύομεν καὶ τὴν ἐν σοὶ μοῦσαν θαρρεῖν προτρεπόμεθα· συνήθη, ὡς ὁρᾷς, καὶ ἀφελῆ καὶ κοινά, καὶ τοῦτο αὐτὸ παρακλητικῶς, προσφθεγγόμεθα, ὡς ἄρα ὑγιῶς ἡμῖν ἔχει τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὰ πράγματα δεξιῶς, ἅπερ οὖν οὕτω σοι καὶ αὐτῷ ἔχειν βουλοίμεθα· φθέγγου τοιγαροῦν ἀδεῶς καὶ γράμματά σου πυκνοτέρως φοιτάτω ἡμῖν, ἵνα κἀν τούτῳ οὖν ἀπολαύωμεν ἀλλήλων, ἐπεὶ τῆς κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς συντυχίας ἀποστερήμεθα.

Several representations of communication converge here. Nikephoros says that he now moves his hand, ostensibly in the physical act of writing this letter. Actually, it is more likely that he dictated his letter to a secretary.[71] But his tongue is also involved, conjuring up oral communication. The act of communication itself is described by the verb (προσ)φθέγγομαι, very frequently used in letter writing. The verb emphasizes the sonorous aspect of an utterance. Yet, Nikephoros uses the verb "see" when he describes his friend reading his words. Writing and speaking, hearing and seeing are used interchangeably, and this happens often in letters.[72] To a certain extent the references to orality can be considered as figurative speech, and as part of the motif of the letter as a substitution for live conversation, but all the same it would anticipate a potential performance of the letter. In other words, the letters themselves leave all options open.

In a more revealing passage, Eustathios of Thessaloniki reports that, after unfolding a letter, he started reading it by himself. But because he was ill, his eyes became so tired that he gave the letter to another person to have it read to him.[73] The letter implies that the recipient would mostly read the letter by himself, using his own eyes, as Eustathios mentions explicitly, but that other ways of reading, involving third persons, were certainly possible. In the letter mentioned above, Symeon Magistros writes that, after "unloosening the shackle", he first looked avidly at the length of the letter. He then perused it word by word, with much attention, prolonging his pleasure.[74] These examples strongly suggest a reading experience that is primarily private, visual, repeated, and intense, with the material dimension of the letter as an important factor.

The visual appearance of the letter thus also played a role in the social value of epistolary communication. In one letter, Mauropous describes the alternating of black ink and white paper in his friend's letter, comparing this to the colors of a swallow, a comparison he makes as part of the spring metaphor that runs through the letter.[75] References to handwriting are few and far between, perhaps because most letters were physically written by secretaries, who nonetheless were expected to write beautifully.[76] However, Symeon Magistros tells

71 On dictating letters and secretaries, see Tomadakis, *Ἐπιστολογραφία*, pp. 62–66.

72 See, for instance, Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 59, ed. Kolovou, pp. 80–81, esp. l. 21–25; Ignatios the Deacon, *Letters*, no. 48, eds. and trans. Mango/Efthymiadis, pp. 126–27. See also Cavallo, "Tracce", p. 425.

73 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, no. 46, ed. Kolovou, p. 127, l. 12–14.

74 Symeon Magistros, *Letters*, no. 89, ed. Darrouzès, p. 150, l. 13–18.

75 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 1, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 42–45.

76 See Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, no. 334, ed. and trans. Courtonne, vol. 3, pp. 201–02, addressing a *kalligraphos* about the importance of writing clearly and beautifully so that the eyes of the reader do not get tired. See also Tomadakis, *Ἐπιστολογραφία*, pp. 65–66.

his friend that he longs for the "impressions of your most beloved hand" in the letters he expects from him, probably referring to handwriting.[77] An anonymous tenth-century letter-writer sees the traces of the letters written in ink as mirrors of the desire of friends.[78] A letter of Psellos closes with a formula to assert that he has written it by his own hand, perhaps implying that the opposite was to be expected.[79] In any case, the recent attention of scholars to oral performance should not make us blind to the importance of the letters as material objects, to be experienced visually. Reading letters was an experience involving many senses, combining visual with acoustic experience.[80]

The reception of the letter does not stop at a first reading. Re-reading is an important part of the continued appreciation of a letter.[81] Michael Psellos frequently makes clear that he reads letters from his friends repeatedly.[82] Theophylact is happy to unroll his friend's letter as often as he likes.[83]

At least a substantial number of extant letters may just have been read privately. Letters, in any case, anticipate reading responses that are intimate and strictly personal. Psellos describes the emotional responses of friends upon reading his letters: they smile, laugh, or shake their heads in bewilderment.[84] He himself in one letter describes his emotional response to his friend's letter as changing from joy to pride to admiration.[85]

In spite of these indications of private, and more or less silent and visual reading, we find as often indications of performative reading. References to "hearing" a letter are, in quite a few cases, more than a metaphor.[86] We will see many of them in the next section, where performative reading clearly lifts the letter to a more public forum.

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77 Symeon Magistros, *Letters*, no. 54, ed. Darrouzès, pp. 132–33, l. 11–12: τῆς φιλτάτης τύπους χειρός.

78 Anonymous (tenth-century), *Letters*, no. 26, ed. Darrouzès, p. 362, l. 2–7.

79 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 58, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 125–27, esp. l. 47 and no. 59, ibid., pp. 127–30, esp. l. 52–53. See Papaioannou, "Mirrors", p. 93, n. 34.

80 See also Cavallo, "Tracce", pp. 424–26 and Riehle, "Epistolary Voices".

81 On intensive and repeated reading in Byzantium, see Cavallo, "Tracce", p. 433.

82 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 449, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 865, l. 17 (reading the letter twice); no. 436, ibid., p. 849, l. 2–3 ("often"); no. 445, ibid., p. 857, l. 4–5 (unable to put letter away or to stop reading).

83 Theophylact of Ochrid, *Letters*, no. 78, ed. and trans. Gautier, pp. 414–15, l. 5–8.

84 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 307, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 718, l. 7 (smiling); no. 68, ibid., vol. 1, p. 154, l. 37 (laughing); no. 335, ibid., vol. 2, p. 742, l. 14–15 (shaking head).

85 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 407, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 829, l. 3–5.

86 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 64, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 141, l. 12–13: τῆς ἐπιμελοῦς … ἀκροάσεως.

4 Public Intimacy

"Public intimacy" is the term Margaret Mullett has used for a remarkable tension in Byzantine letters.[87] On the one hand, letters are private and intimate. Internally, they strictly concern a relationship between two persons: the sender and the recipient. On the other hand, this intimacy is to a certain extent public: the letter was expected to be read by others as well.

To begin with, letters were enjoyed as showcases of literary and rhetorical skills, by an audience of intellectual peers of the author. Eustathios assumes that one of his letters was going to be displayed in front of other people, influencing the author's reputation.[88] Other letters clearly refer to the performance of letters in front of a gathered audience. Many letters from Late Antiquity allude to this practice.[89] And in a well-known letter, Michael Italikos mentions a letter of Nikephoros Bryennios that was expected to be read in a *logikon theatron*, with a herald introducing the letter and with many listeners standing round about.[90] This eventually resulted in a rich tradition of collective performance among Byzantine literati, for which the term *theatron* would eventually stick. Especially in letters of the Palaiologan period, the *theatron* appears as a lively setting for highly dramatic performances of letters, before an attentive audience of intellectual peers who assessed the worth of the letter (and the performance) in a game of mutual testing and competition.[91]

Apart from the phenomenon of literary *theatron*, there were various ways in which letters could shift from intimate to public documents, acquiring their social relevance when performed for, or shown to, an audience beyond the primary recipient. Evidence for this is rarely found in the letters that are performed themselves, but it occurs in other letters preparing for, or following up on, the public performance.

It often emerges that people knew about the existence and content of letters sent to others. Symeon Magistros says that he "saw many other people enjoying the letters" of his friend, while he was neglected.[92] Theophylact finds it normal that his friend will be able to read Theophylact's letters addressed to his enemies.[93]

87 Mullett, *Theophylact*, pp. 17–18.

88 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, no. 19, ed. Kolovou, esp. p. 71, l. 286–89.

89 See Cavallo, *Lire à Byzance,* p. 58.

90 Michael Italikos, *Letters*, no. 17, ed. Gautier, pp. 153–54.

91 Hunger, "Hochsprachliche profane Literatur", vol. 1, pp. 208–211; Medvedev, "The So-called θέατρα"; Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, pp. 17–61; and Chapter 13 in this volume.

92 Symeon Magistros, *Letters*, no. 95, ed. Darrouzès, p. 155, l. 5–6.

93 Theophylact of Ochrid, *Letters*, no. 99, ed. and trans. Gautier, pp. 506–07, esp. l. 10.

Some letters were intended to be shown to third persons from the start. Theophylact sent a letter with his pupil Niketas, addressed to Michael Doukas, which Niketas was also to show to Michael's mother, Mary of Bulgaria.[94] In another letter, he asks George Palaiologos' secretary to show this very letter to his master, in relation to a tax matter.[95] The secretary is the nominal addressee, but in fact he is expected to mediate for Theophylact with a more powerful person. Psellos announces to his friend (perhaps the *doux* of Cyprus) who had sent him a letter, that he had shown this letter to a third, unnamed, person.[96] This person read the letter repeatedly and congratulated Psellos on his friendship with the *doux*. This letter is a proof of an intimate relationship between two persons, but this intimacy also functions as a signal sent to a third person. In this way, many letters blur the line between addressee and broader audience.

There is also a small number of letters addressed to more than one recipient.[97] Most of them consciously take up this feature as a theme, which may indicate its exceptional nature. In a letter to two friends, Eustathios rejoices because his letter, repeatedly described as a "sheet of paper" (χάρτης), will be read out by many lips; subsequent imagery includes the terms *stadia* and *theatra*.[98] These references are clearly triggered by the fact that Eustathios here addresses two recipients: does this mean that this kind of communal reading is as exceptional as is the double address?

Letters with political or diplomatic content were often performed publicly. Diplomatic embassies between the Byzantine and Persian empires in the early seventh century revolved around the public reading of imperial letters. These highly ritualized ceremonies defined the relations between the two empires.[99] Letters sent with embassies stood at the center of negotiations, and their delivery and reading followed a codified protocol, charged with political meaning.[100] A letter of Psellos to a military commander describes an embassy of the Seljuks from Aleppo. This was a public and highly ritualized event in the imperial palace, with the reading of a letter at its core.[101] More work can be done on the role of letters in diplomacy, taking into account not only historiographical

94 Theophylact of Ochrid, *Letters*, no. 84, ed. and trans. Gautier, pp. 440–43.
95 Theophylact of Ochrid, *Letters*, no. 88, ed. and trans. Gautier, pp. 460–63.
96 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 407, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, pp. 829–31, esp. l. 27–29.
97 For example Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 23, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 54–60; John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 76, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 192–93; Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, no. 30, ed. Kolovou, pp. 85–93.
98 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, no. 26, ed. Kolovou, p. 78.
99 Piras, "Ritualità". See also Kalogeras, "Emperor, Embassy".
100 Drocourt, "Place de l'écrit".
101 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 189, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 494–96, esp. l. 34–55.

sources, but also actual imperial letters, to be found, for example, in the collections of Theodore Daphnopates and Michael Psellos, who composed letters in the emperor's name.[102]

In the corpus of Michael Psellos' writings, we find a number of letters where public intimacy goes a step further. These letters concern petitions and requests that are read aloud during public performances, which are perhaps better called "audiences", because they are formalized events, including a decision maker, mostly the emperor, and various mediators, who use the letter to defend the applicant's case, while the applicant himself is not present.

The most extensive account of such a performance is to be found in a letter to the "son of the droungarios", identified with Pothos.[103] One evening, Psellos received a letter from Pothos, which, as we may infer, spurred him to action about an issue relating to people harassing Pothos. The next morning, Psellos rushed to the palace and asked the emperor about a letter from Pothos (obviously, Pothos had mentioned this letter in his letter to Psellos). What follows is a detailed narrative of this letter read in public:[104]

> I asked the emperor for your first letter. And immediately, as agreed, many people exerted themselves for the same effort[105] as me. The "letter introducer" read your letter addressed to the emperor, and both sides next to the imperial throne contributed something about your case, each person something else. In this, they followed me, because I was, as it were, the leader of a tragic reading. I accurately enacted your sufferings, playing the drama with my tongue better than you had done when you wrote your letter, and relating in detail and with much emotion everything that has happened to you. Your wonderful uncle shed tears at every point,

102 On imperial letters see also Chapter 7 in this volume.

103 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 217, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, pp. 581–83.

104 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 217, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 582, l. 26–38: κἀγώ σοι τῷ βασιλεῖ περὶ πρώτου τοῦ σοῦ ἐδεόμην γράμματος. Καὶ αὐτίκα πολλοὶ ἐκ συνθήματος εἰς τὸ αὐτό μοι συνεκπεπνεύκεσαν· καὶ ὁ μὲν γραμματοεισαγωγεὺς τὸ πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα σου γράμμα ὑπανεγίνωσκεν, αἱ δ' ἐφ' ἑκάτερα μερίδες τοῦ βασιλείου βήματος ἄλλος ἄλλο τι τῶν περὶ σοῦ συνεφόρει, ἐμοὶ καθάπερ ἡγεμόνι τῆς τραγικῆς ἑπόμενοι διαλέξεως, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἀκριβῶς ὑπετραγῴδησά σοι τὸ πάθος, κάλλιον ἐν γλώττῃ τὸ δρᾶμα ὑποκριθείς, ἢ σὺ ὁ γράψας ἐν γράμμασι, καὶ πάντα σοι τὰ συμβεβηκότα ἐπιδραμὼν ἀκριβῶς καὶ περιπαθῶς. Ὁ δὲ θαυμάσιος θεῖος ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἐδάκρυε· καὶ προσθεῖναί τι τῷ λόγῳ βουλόμενος, τῷ πνεύματι διεκόπτετο. Καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς αὐτίκα οἴκτου τε ἐμπίπλαται καὶ θυμοῦ (οἴκτου μὲν ἐπὶ σοί, θυμοῦ δὲ κατὰ τῶν ἐπὶ σὲ τολμησάντων). See also the discussion of this letter in Chapter 13, pp. 361–62 of this volume.

105 I have some uncertainty about this translation. Psellos often uses the expression συμπνέω εἰς τὸ αὐτό to refer to intense collaboration, but ἐκπνέω literally means "breathe one's last breath".

> and, wanting to add something to the discourse, his breath was cut short. And the emperor was immediately filled with pity and anger, pity for you, and anger for the people who have dared to do these things to you.

The reading of Pothos' letter is a public event, defined by various patronage relationships. Although the actual reading is apparently executed by an official (the γραμματοεισαγωγεύς), it is clear that this reading is introduced, explained, and complemented by discourses by several members of Pothos' network at court. Psellos' role in the whole is clearly that of a mediator. He gives a detailed and persuasive account of the issue at hand, assuming a function not unlike some bearers, although he did not physically deliver Pothos' letter. The status of Pothos' letter to the emperor is far from intimate: Psellos knew about the letter before it was read publicly. Psellos puts great emphasis on the emotional and dramatic side of this reading. He acts a part and adds emotions seemingly at will.

Psellos performs in successive letters a similar service for Nicholas Skleros, an important and influential friend of his.[106] Nicholas asks to be delivered from his office of *krites* of the Aegean. In a first letter, Psellos expounds his plans to raise Nicholas' case with the emperor, mentioning how he could perform a pleasing and melodious reading of Nicholas' charming letter.[107] In a second letter, Psellos reports that he had received a letter from Nicholas, which he (Psellos) read to the emperor, while pleading for Nicholas' case with many tears.[108] In a last letter, Psellos again relates how he read Nicholas' letter addressed to him before the emperor, who eventually complied with the request.[109] Psellos is the nominal recipient of Nicholas' letter, and there is no reason to doubt that it had all the properties of a private letter. But the letter is made public and read to the emperor by Psellos, adding his own words to negotiate the case, and performing a highly dramatic and emotional reading. He is a mediator between letter-writer and patron, whom the sender cannot address directly. Psellos read the letter here himself (instead of a dedicated official), again in a highly dramatic and emotional scene. Psellos' letters in particular include many references to these public readings of letters at the imperial court,[110] because he had an unsurpassed role as a power-broker and person close to the emperor.

106 See also Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp. 94–95.

107 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 268, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, pp. 646–49.

108 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 270, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, pp. 652–54.

109 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 271, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, pp. 654–55.

110 See also Michael Psellos, *Letters*, nos. 99 and 203, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 213–14 and 545.

Other letter-writers appear not as mediators, but as applicants themselves, asking others to deliver and read letters before powerful patrons. Mauropous asked a correspondent to introduce a letter to their "common lord" (probably the emperor).[111] In another letter, he asked his friend to introduce a letter to the patriarch, and to be present at the delivery of a gift, ensuring that everything would turn out in Mauropous' favor.[112] John Tzetzes asked a *protopsaltes* to deliver a letter to the emperor Manuel Komnenos, and to have it read in front of him by someone who also favors the new patriarch, just as Tzetzes does. The letter to the emperor itself immediately follows in the collection.[113] Michael Italikos also wrote letters in which he asked powerful friends to deliver a letter to the emperor, and to read it in front of him, expounding his case persuasively.[114] These examples show how influential the performance of a letter is: people sought the correct intermediaries, not only to establish contact with the emperor and plead their case, but also to read their petition in a favorable way.

For these letters, the public performance is the real level at which the letter finds its social significance. The audience beyond the recipient is in these cases not only a detached public that reads these letters because of aesthetic or intellectual interests. It is patronage that we see here at work, with eloquence, mediation, and persuasion as primary ingredients. The reading of the letter, performed by various persons (either the mediator, the patron, other persons in the network, or a neutral official) is the core of these patronage events, complemented by additional discourses and intensified by a high degree of drama and theatre.

5 Epistolary Codes

Byzantine letter exchange is regulated by various social and cultural conventions. These influenced many parameters concerning letter exchange, such as when to write, how to write (that is, in what register and style), and how much to write. We could call this set of conventions "epistolary etiquette", or "decorum", although there is more to it than simply courtesy. These rules embody a collective self-representation, often also a mutual test; and quite naturally, due to the nature of the surviving letters, it is the intellectualist ideals of the *logioi*

111 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 59, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 162–63.
112 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 67, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 178–79.
113 John Tzetzes, *Letters*, nos. 45 and 46, ed. Leone, pp. 64–67.
114 Michael Italikos, *Letters*, nos. 39 and 40, ed. Gautier, pp. 228–33.

that define and enforce the rules. Perhaps a more apt (but also more vague) term is "epistolary codes",[115] because, more often than not, these rules are implicit rather than explicit. And it is of course essential to epistolary codes that they are shared by sender and recipient; when they are not, this can lead to misunderstandings, in itself an interesting group of letters to study.

Rather than considering these codes as a fossilized set of *topoi*, we could investigate how social hierarchies, networking parameters (closeness, connectedness, intimacy) impacted the way correspondents framed their letters. When doing this, we should be aware that the conventions of the epistolary genre were only rarely formally expounded in theoretical works,[116] and could be flexibly applied in practice.

Gustav Karlsson has carried out the most systematic work on these epistolary codes in Byzantium.[117] His study is essentially an overview of themes and motifs concerning friendship. His approach to letters as a formal genre prevented him from taking more dynamic social realities into account: what is the correspondent's place in the network of the letter writer, is their relationship symmetric or asymmetric, etc.? Mullett's analysis of Theophylact's complex social network showed how these questions are indeed more important than fixed general rules.[118]

One of the places where epistolary codes come most clearly to the surface is in the form of address. Many Byzantine letters, mostly at the beginning, contain an address in which the sender defines his relationship with the recipient. Michael Grünbart's essential work on the subject shows that forms of address in Byzantine letters depend on a plethora of social and cultural factors.[119] Official titles, both secular and clerical, are of course important, but only indirectly: instead of giving an official title, letters include an address that indicates sufficient respect, dependent on the hierarchy between sender and recipient.[120] The accompanying adjectives indicate subtle qualifications of respect, deference, or intimacy. Particular personal properties such as learnedness or piety could be emphasized. Specific relationships, such as between teachers and students, entailed specific forms of address. Often, addresses use the vocabulary of kinship relations, taken in a spiritual way. Letter-writers sometimes

115 Compare Ebbeler, "Mixed Messages".
116 For an overview of these theoretical works, see Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*. See also the Introduction, pp. 7–10, Chapter 1, pp. 54–58 and Chapter 6, pp. 177–78 in this volume.
117 Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial*.
118 Mullett, *Theophylact*.
119 Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede*.
120 Mullett, *Theophylact*, p. 170.

consciously reflected on the correct use of the form of address, clearly seeing it as a formal recognition of mutual friendship.[121]

Epistolary codes are also reflected in the use of certain terms that carry subtle social values that still need to be precisely mapped. The adjective φορτικός is a good example. This word, which can mean "vulgar", is used in the context of Byzantine epistolary codes in its more literal meaning of "burdensome". It conveys the sense that the sender is bothering the addressee, that he is wasting his time, and is thus being onerous, because his humble nature is not fitting to the addressee's lofty status. In one letter, Eustathios of Thessaloniki consciously plays on the literal meaning of the words ὀχληρός and φορτικός and their relation to epistolary etiquette.[122] In other words, when φορτικός or related notions (ὀχληρός, etc.) are brought into play, there is a social economy inverse to intellectualist ideals: sending long and frequent letters, instead of improving and continuing the friendship, is represented as potentially impertinent.

Another key term is παρρησία, of which the standard translation is "freedom of speech". In Byzantine epistolary context, it refers to the permission to write, granted by the person who is represented as socially superior. Often, letter writers excuse themselves for abusing their παρρησία, or express their joy when a correspondent grants them παρρησία, a defining moment for the progress of an epistolary friendship. John Tzetzes often represents παρρησία as a favor (χάρις), or "permission" (ἄδεια), which a superior person grants him, and which gives him the courage (θάρσος) to write the present letter.[123] Παρρησία corresponds to the degree of familiarity that one enjoys with another person, the extent of permissible speech: it can allow for playful derision,[124] it can introduce a (gentle) reproach of a higher-placed person,[125] and in most cases it serves as permission to make a request.[126] It is also invoked when a sender wants to initiate or intensify the relationship with a person superior in the social hierarchy.[127]

An epistolary relationship proceeds in certain ritualized steps. A first important step is the initiation of a relationship.[128] Establishing the right to cor-

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121 For example Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 203, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 545, addressed to Leo Paraspondylos.

122 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Letters*, no. 35, ed. Kolovou, p. 102.

123 John Tzetzes, *Letters*, no. 29, ed. Leone, p. 44, l. 17; no. 40, ibid., p. 59, l. 10; no. 34, ibid., p. 49, l. 4.

124 John Tzetzes, *Letters*, no. 16, ed. Leone, pp. 29–31, where the joke was not appreciated.

125 For example Leo of Synada, *Letters*, no. 45, ed. and trans. Vinson, esp. pp. 72–73, l. 6 (παρρησιασάμενον χαριεντίσασθαι) and Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 76, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 163, l. 11.

126 John Tzetzes, *Letters*, no. 34, ed. Leone, pp. 49–50.

127 For example Anonymous (tenth century), *Letters*, no. 29, ed. Darrouzès, p. 365, l. 9.

128 Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, p. 210.

respond marks the line between having someone in one's social network or not. It is mostly indicated by the word οἰκείωσις ("the making of an acquaintanceship"), resulting in an "acquaintance" (οἰκειότης or γνωριμότης), and, ideally, "friendship" (φιλία). The rituals are even more elaborate when a socially inferior person seeks contact with a more powerful person. In such cases, their relationship resembles a patron-client relationship, of which the balance of power makes itself deeply felt. It almost always required mediation by an acquaintance of the sender who stands closer to the more powerful person.

A letter of Psellos to the nephew of the emperor Isaac I Komnenos is an excellent case to demonstrate the subtle rules of establishing epistolary communication.[129] Psellos says that he had wanted to write a letter to this nephew earlier, but he feared being impertinent (φορτικός is the word he uses[130]). A certain Joseph acted as a mediator and encouraged Psellos to write to the nephew. Psellos now offers his "epistolary embrace".[131] He has already had the chance to admire the nephew's letters, when they were read by the emperor himself.[132] This would mean that Psellos assisted in public readings of imperial letters and answers. Towards the end of the letter, Psellos makes clear that, since he has been the first to write, there is now a debt that the nephew should repay, which leads to a request for a favor (the nature of which is not specified). Psellos makes use of this new acquaintance with the nephew when he wants to establish contact with the emperor Isaac Komnenos himself. In a letter to the nephew, Psellos thanks him for having paved the way.[133] He says that he has now been audacious enough to write a short letter to Isaac. He now anxiously awaits the reaction of the emperor: if he loathes the letter, Psellos will wisely refrain from writing again.

In a letter to a *mystikos*, Psellos does the same:[134] he thanks his friend for mediating with the emperor. He calculates his chances, depending on what he had heard about the emperor's disposition, and mentions that he has sent the emperor a letter. Psellos emphasizes that it is still a short letter and not too sophisticated. This would perhaps be too impertinent – the menace of being φορτικός looms large over this attempt to initiate an imbalanced relationship.

Theophylact begins a letter to the patriarch by declaring that it is an honor for him to be able to write.[135] As a recommendation, he mentions that the bish-

129 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 143, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 387–90.
130 Ibid., p. 387, l. 4.
131 Ibid., p. 387, l. 13: τὸν ἐπιστολιμαῖον … ἀσπασμόν.
132 Ibid., p. 388, l. 17–18.
133 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 41, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 96.
134 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 389, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, pp. 806–07.
135 Theophylact of Ochrid, *Letters*, no. 64, ed. and trans. Gautier, pp. 360–61.

op of Pelagonia urged him to write. Their relationship is certainly unequal: the patriarch "lowered" himself by reaching out to Theophylact (συγκατάβασις).

Psellos himself was heavily in demand as a go-between. In a letter to the bishop of Parnasos, he mentions that he has written a letter which the bishop had requested. This letter is addressed to the *caesar* John Doukas, one of the most influential close "friends" of Psellos. Psellos has now sent this letter to the *caesar*, and a copy of it to the bishop. Psellos assures that it will help the bishop to be on friendly terms with the *caesar* (in Psellos' words: to gain παρρησία and οἰκείωσις with him).[136] The letter in question follows immediately thereafter in the manuscript:[137] Psellos assures the *caesar* that the bishop is a genuine friend, and he asks explicitly for the same things he had promised the bishop: that he may enjoy παρρησία and οἰκείωσις with the *caesar*.[138]

Being the first to write is significant: whoever writes first can congratulate himself on being the more loyal of the pair.[139] It creates a debt that the recipient has to repay.[140] But it can also mean that he is impertinent. If no mediator is available, normally the social superior is expected to take the initiative. When Michael Choniates writes to Theodore Kastamonites, the uncle of the emperor, who bears the imposing title of *protopanentimohypertatos*, he states that there was no acquaintance (γνωριμότης) between them, and Michael was so intimidated by the lofty status of Kastamonites that he did not dare to take the initiative to write.[141] But now that Kastamonites has sent him letters, Michael takes courage (θάρσος, a word repeated many times). Symeon Magistros likewise asserts that he did not dare to write because he was so insignificant: if he took the initiative to write, he could be seen as impertinent. But now his correspondent has given him the sign to go ahead: from now on, being silent is a greater crime than to write.[142]

A letter of Theodore of Cyzicus to Symeon reproaches him for his silence, reminding him of the rules for taking the initiative to write.[143] Since Symeon is doing well, and Theodore is unhappy to the point of hating his own life, it is an anomaly that Theodore is forced to take the παρρησία and the audacity to write, with the risk of appearing impertinent (ὀχληρός). And when Leo of

136 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 294, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, pp. 704–05.
137 See Gautier, "Deux manuscrits", p. 73.
138 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 49, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 111–12.
139 See Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial*, p. 44 with further references.
140 See also Leo of Synada, *Letters*, no. 48, ed. and trans. Vinson, pp. 74–75.
141 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 44, ed. Kolovou, pp. 59–60.
142 Symeon Magistros, *Letters*, no. 8, ed. Darrouzès, pp. 103–04.
143 Theodore of Cyzicus, *Letters*, app., no. 1.1, ed. Tziatzi-Papagianni, esp. p. 122, l. 15–16.

Synada tries to re-establish epistolary contact with a friend, he refers to the fact that he is the first to write, thereby provoking his friend to reply.[144]

The question of how much to write can be intricate, and length is an aspect of epistolary decorum that is often dwelled upon. On the one hand, long letters are a sign of devotion to the friendship. The length of the letter should match the letter to which it responds. Michael Choniates hopes that his friend will write back to him a letter of equal length.[145] Psellos reproaches Paraspondylos for writing a short letter.[146] On the other hand, long letters, or frequent letters, can be "burdensome" and impertinent. Mauropous asks his friend not to chastise him for his brevity: he should know that brevity can be a sign of modesty.[147] Michael Choniates claims that he wanted to write to the patriarch, but he realized that it is burdensome (φορτικόν) to write entreating letters continuously.[148] Thus, epistolary etiquette not only required one to write; depending on various subtle social factors, letter writers could express a hesitation to write.

The above remarks are only some suggestions of what can be done to understand Byzantine epistolary codes better. No doubt there are many more parameters that have to be taken into account. For example, it has been suggested that social hierarchy influenced the use of personal pronouns, both in the second and in the first person.[149] Other less measurable factors may also be dependent on the level of intimacy and the social hierarchy between sender and recipient: the level of style, the linguistic register, the amount of flattery or denials of flattery, structural elements such as the *captatio benevolentiae* and farewell formulas,[150] the verbs that introduce a request (is δέομαι stronger than ἀξιόω, as a letter of Alexander of Nikaia would have us believe?[151]), etc.

Work in this direction is made more difficult because protocol and codes do not function as fixed rules. A letter writer could show his intimate knowledge of the social codes even more if he breached them slightly in a playful way. Michael Choniates styles one of his letters as a very self-conscious game around the unwritten rules that prescribe who should write first.[152] Playful derision, or deliberate deviation from the rules, are risky games that Byzantine

144 Leo of Synada, *Letters*, no. 37, ed. and trans. Vinson, esp. pp. 60–61, l. 9.
145 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 98, ed. Kolovou, p. 130, l. 9.
146 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 204, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 546.
147 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 42, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 136–37.
148 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 14, ed. Kolovou, pp. 18–19, esp. l. 6–8.
149 Second person: Grünbart, "Ferngespräche", p. 40. First person: Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial*, p. 142.
150 For the *captatio benevolentiae* in the West, see for instance Ysebaert, "Networks".
151 Alexander of Nikaia, *Letters*, no. 2, ed. Darrouzès, p. 72, l. 28.
152 Michael Choniates, *Letters*, no. 13, ed. Kolovou, pp. 17–18.

letter writers love to play: when successful, they could enhance the exclusive and intimate character of a friendship.[153]

It may be clear by now that much work still lies ahead of us. The rules underlying Byzantine epistolary communication demand their own study: merely seeing them as a continuation of ancient epistolary theory will not suffice. Considering Byzantine letters as formal games will not do justice to the reality of social issues that are at stake. And we would need to take into account personal idiosyncrasies, different types of relationships, the social and cultural subgroup of sender and recipient, diachronic evolutions, and more intractable features such as misjudgments, misrepresentations, and playfulness.

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CHAPTER 12

The Epistolographic Self

Stratis Papaioannou

τοῦ αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ὡς ἀπ᾽ ἄλλου[1]

1 The Premises

1.1 *Rhetoric and the Self*

Due to the available evidence, letter-writing in Byzantium has been studied, primarily and justifiably so, as a genre that belonged to the wider rhetorical tradition and thus to the literary discourse of the learned, cultural, and often social elite.[2] In approaching the question of the epistolographic self, we must thus begin with an understanding of what rhetoric was in Byzantium and what kinds of "self" – understood here as discursive subjectivity – it promoted.[3]

From linguistic and anthropological perspectives, rhetoric – to put it here as briefly as possible – was a distinct mode of communication, based on a codified and markedly learned register of language; as such, it defined writing as well as oral performance for specific private and public settings, included a set of expectations pertaining to form, and promoted a series of character-types / literary personae pertaining to content. Training in these types of style and model "selves" was inculcated through the study and imitation of ancient, early Byzantine, and a few middle Byzantine exemplary authors – from Demosthenes to Gregory of Nazianzos and, in later centuries, from Symeon Metaphrastes to Michael Psellos. Simultaneously, competence in rhetoric was judged by one's ability not only to imitate these models, but also to establish

1 Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, no. 48, ed. Eustratiades, p. 197.

2 See, e.g., the list of letter-writers reviewed in Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede*, pp. 15–27. Most of these authors' letters usually survive in manuscripts that either contain each individual writer's rhetorical production or join together letter-collections and other similarly learned works by a variety of writers for the purposes of (primarily) rhetorical education.

3 For discursive subjectivity, namely the web of personal emotions, experiences, relations, and views as expressed and constructed through language, see, e.g., Schrag, *The Self*, pp. 11–41.

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one's unique talent. Rhetoric was thus bound by the emphasis on tradition and literary canon in theory, as well as the necessity to distinguish oneself in practice.

This tension between norm and individuality was further accentuated by the sociological placement of rhetoric, which presupposed a competitive arena. For, while the layers of learnedness were potentially infinite, access to them was limited to those with sufficient economic or social capital – money as well as personal connections – that would allow them to acquire advanced literacy. A constant effect of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion was therefore produced: inclusion for those who could prove their competence in rhetorical learnedness, and exclusion for those who could not.

As such, a seminal consequence of rhetoric for whoever engaged with it, either as listener/reader or, especially, as speaker/writer, was that he or (more rarely) she was immediately put in the spotlight. This was a discursive practice that was predicated upon an accentuated self-awareness and self-display: the heightened need to show to others that you belong to an exclusive group by following its norms, but also that you can excel and differ by your own skill, talent, and individual voice.[4]

1.2 *Letter-Writing*

If we approach Byzantine rhetoric in this light, then like all other rhetorical genres – such as orations, rhetorical storytelling (in hagiography, historiography, etc.), and high-style poetry, to name the most important – letter-writing too presented writers and readers with a field for self-awareness and self-display, where the ability to both belong and differ was regularly exhibited. Indeed, of all rhetorical genres, epistolography was regarded, at least from a theoretical perspective, as we shall see below, as particularly self-referential since it operated under the expectation of authenticity and intimacy in private correspondence. This was the case even if letters were often read by circles of readers that exceeded the original addressee, whether during the initial context of a letter's circulation, or, especially, when a letter was deemed worthy of being included in a manuscript that collected the literary production of a writer.

Selves, whether real or imagined, displayed or craftily hidden, thus proliferate in Byzantine letters. We encounter multiple expressions of emotion as well as snippets of autobiographical narrative. We also find multiple demonstrations of high rhetorical skill that could establish the advanced cultural profile of a writer, but which also often turn self-disclosure to literary 'impersonation'.

4 This chapter builds on Papaioannou, "Letter-writing", "Byzantine Mirrors", *Michael Psellos*, and *Μιχαὴλ Ψελλός* where there is also further relevant bibliography.

1.3 *A Self-Centered Genre? The Constraints*

Self-centeredness was indeed a seminal feature of letter-writing. Still, it would be a mistake to consider Byzantine epistolography as a genre focused exclusively on the self, either one's public image or one's inner life, even if we modern readers are almost by default accustomed to approach epistolography as a type of writing fixated with the self.[5] We should not forget that the primary purpose of actual letters in Byzantium was, after all, to establish contact between two people separated by physical distance and to communicate whatever immediate need, concern, request, etc. that pertained to matters of everyday life. As is evident from the overwhelming majority of the many non-literary and non-rhetorical letters that survive in papyrus fragments from late antiquity, and which we can consider, *mutatis mutandis*, as representative of letter-writing as it was practiced on a daily basis throughout the Byzantine period, written communication first and foremost served practical needs. This is a written world where both introspection and literariness recede into the background behind greetings, inquiries, instructions, complaints, recommendations, wishes, and so on and so forth.[6]

Even if "published" letter-collections – namely those containing usually rhetorically informed letters that were deemed worthy to be copied into a manuscript and be read by wider and, eventually, future circles of readers – were partially stripped of the everydayness and utilitarian nature of the original missives, these features still pervade the letters and letter-collections that have survived as part of the Byzantine rhetorical tradition. In a very large number of these collections (perhaps much larger than we might expect), the self may be ever-present only in the minimal sense of the first person perspective that dominates the genre; for the self is also remarkably ever-absent as writers are preoccupied with whatever practical purpose their letter is to serve in the here and now. Even the letters of characteristically learned and ostensibly self-involved rhetors, such as, for instance, Michael Psellos in the eleventh century, can occasionally be devoid of excessive learnedness or rhetorical artistry and lacking in intricate self-revelation or self-fashioning.

Further suppression of the authorial "self" in letter-writing resulted from Byzantine decorum. Both Christian ethics and ancient rhetoric demanded that a writer does not focus on him/herself so as to avoid the accusation of

5 "Letters should be indiscretions" wrote T.S. Eliot to his friend Conrad Aiken in 1914 (*The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, p. 82); on epistolography in European modernity see, e.g., Gay, *The Naked Heart*.

6 See Chapter 1 in this volume or the letters in Bagnall/Cribiore, *Women's Letters* (see their remarks on p. 5); see also Papathomas/Koroli, "Subjectivité et stylistique" for an insightful analysis of a private letter from the perspective of the construction of subjectivity.

arrogance.[7] A side-effect of this was the fact that, in a large number of cases (though again no statistics exist), the first-person singular was substituted by the first-person plural. This occurs even in expressions where modern writers would especially and insistently use the "I": "as far as we are concerned, we have showed pure love to you, and will also love you still more genuinely" writes Psellos to an anonymous judge, referring to himself alone.[8] Modesty was also taken into consideration in a genre in which writers struggled to express themselves as well as show off.[9]

With these general observations in mind – (a) the tension in Byzantine rhetoric between tradition, norm, and group identity on the one hand, and individuality and personal distinction on the other; and (b) the constraints imposed on self-writing by both the practical nature of letter exchanges and the morality of humility – this chapter will probe some parameters for the construction as well as expression of the self in Byzantine "real, rhetorical" letters. By the latter locution, I am referring to the majority of our evidence for Byzantine epistolography; these letters were "real" in the sense that they were most likely exchanged between a sender and an addressee, and "rhetorical" in the sense that they were invested with the learned idiom of rhetoric briefly outlined above.[10]

The purpose is not to be comprehensive, as that would perhaps be an impossible task; for one might argue that, from a certain angle, *every single* Byzantine letter that has survived offers yet another nuance of selfhood. Rather, my aim is to identify some recurrent features of the Byzantine epistolographic self, by surveying some normative expectations as well as limitations, a sequence of horizons for the epistolographic genre and thus for its self-representational tropes. Thereby, I hope to suggest possible avenues of approaching this immense body of Byzantine texts from the perspective of the history of discursive subjectivity.

2 Biblical, Literary, and Embedded Letters

It might be useful to begin in an unconventional fashion and look at modes of discursive subjectivity in the wider tradition of Byzantine letter-writing, and how that tradition affected the specific field of "real, rhetorical" letters, the

7 See Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, pp. 132–33.

8 Psellos, *Letters*, no. 332 (to a *magistros* and *krites* of Katotika), ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 738, l. 15–16: Τὸ γοῦν ἐφ' ἡμῖν, καὶ ἠγαπήσαμεν καθαρῶς, καὶ εἰλικρινέστερον ἔτι φιλήσομεν.

9 See further Zilliacus, *Selbstgefühl*.

10 This category is more or less coextensive with what Hunger termed "literarische Privatbriefe"; Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 206–07.

focus of this essay. This is necessary, because in the context of Byzantine book culture, and thus from the perspective of Byzantine readers, "real, rhetorical" letters were often surrounded and influenced (as far as self-representation is concerned) by three further types of Byzantine letters, some of which were read very widely. These are as follows.

(a) What we might term "biblical" letters, namely theological letters and often open letters – addressed to a community of readers – written by or ascribed to Christ's apostles and included in the canon of the Byzantine New Testament, and also similar letters attributed to the so-called Apostolic Fathers and some early Byzantine writers. Beyond the letters of Paul and other Apostles that were read regularly in liturgical contexts, this type also included letters attributed to Dionysios the Areopagite (the most popular of the Apostolic Fathers), Ignatios of Antioch, and also Gregory of Nazianzos, as well as other Church Fathers, some of whose letters were used in the context of canon law or theological instruction and debate.[11]

(b) Collections of what we may call "literary" letters, mostly pre-Byzantine in date and rhetorical in style, attributed to either purely invented characters or to historical or semi-historical figures of the classical past, and used for the purposes of biography, rhetorical instruction, and learned entertainment. This type included such collections as the letters of Plato, Euripides, or Phalaris, the semi-legendary Sicilian ruler of Agrigento, or love letters by fictional characters written by Philostratos or Alkiphron, etc.[12]

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11 On Paul see, e.g., Porter/Adams, *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form*; for Ignatios, see, e.g., Edwards, "When the Dead Speak" and the manuscript Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 57.7 (eleventh century, containing letters by Maximos the Confessor, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzos, and Ignatios); Gregory of Nazianzos' so-called three *Theological Letters* (ed. Gallay), did not circulate with the rest of Gregory's letter-collection, but were included in manuscripts with his orations.

12 For these, see Costa, *Greek Fictional Letters*, with further bibliography; specifically on the letters of Phalaris which were popular among Byzantine readers, see Russell, "The Ass in the Lion's Skin" and Hinz, *Nunc Phalaris* as well as Muratore, *Le epistole di Falaride* on the manuscript transmission. For examples of collections of "fictional" letters co-existing with "real, rhetorical" letters see Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B 004 sup. (Martini-Bassi 81) (tenth century; Phalaris, Isidore of Pelousion, Julian, Libanios, Apollonios of Tyana, Philostratos, and others); Oxford, Bodleian Library, Barocci 50 (tenth century; Philostratos, Libanios, Theophylact Simokates); Vienna, Österreichische Nationalibliothek, phil. gr. 342 (eleventh century; various tenth century epistolographers, with John Chrysostom, Philostratos, Apollonios of Tyana, Alkiphron); Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. Z. 512 (coll. 0678) (late thirteenth century: Alkiphron, Synesios, Plato); Escorial, Real Biblioteca, Z. IV. 5 (Andrés 344) (fourteenth century; Manuel Moschopoulos, Euripides, Hippocrates, Heraclitus, Diogenes, Plato, Aeschines, Basil of Caesarea, Julian, Gregory of Nazianzos).

(c) Letters which lie somewhere between the previous two types, and in which category we may place invented letters, embedded in historiographical,[13] biographical, and, especially, hagiographical narratives. This genre of Byzantine epistolography remains virtually unexplored. In terms of function and style these "embedded" letters resembled "literary" letters, but in terms of effect and authority they often echoed "biblical" letters. Indeed, almost all important figures of the Byzantines' past, from Alexander the Great to Constantine the Great, a large number of Byzantine Saints and Christ himself, were presented in Byzantine narratives *also* as letter-writers.[14]

As might be obvious, these types of letters display a great variety of self-representation, expressed as they are from the perspective of their writer's voice. No justice can be done to this variety here. It is important, nevertheless, to always retain this much larger and widely read epistolographic corpus in mind when we approach Byzantine self-representation in "real, rhetorical" letters. For one could detect certain shared self-representational attitudes that circumscribe letter-writing discourse in general. The following two stand out.

The first, most common among theological letters, is the self-positioning of the letter-writer as an authoritative figure. In such texts, a commanding, didactic, and assertive tone prevails; the content of the letter and its mediator are presented (sometimes explicitly) as divinely inspired; and the writer is vested with an ethos that is introduced as exemplary.[15] As Photios put it, such is the "apostolic style" (ἀποστολικὸς χαρακτήρ), defined by "its nobility, the lack of excessive artistry, purity, and the spontaneous naturalness of discourse".[16] Even a cursory reading of Paul's letters can provide a fair number of examples of such self-positioning,[17] but many literary letters and letter-collections, including some outside the Christian canon, functioned in a similar fashion – for instance, letters attributed to the legendary philosopher Apollonios of Tyana.[18]

13 For letters embedded in historiographical literature and also in the Byzantine romances, see Chapter 15 in this volume.

14 For the most famous among those letters, Christ's letter to King Abgar and its history, see Caseau, "La lettre de Jesus".

15 For such didactic letters see also Chapter 8, esp. pp. 234–39 in this volume.

16 Photios, *Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Romans*, ed. Staab, p. 531, l. 22–24: τὴν εὐγένειαν καὶ τὸ ἀπερίεργον καὶ καθαρὸν καὶ αὐτοφυὲς τοῦ λόγου.

17 E.g., Cor. I 4:15–16, 11–12 and 15:9–10; Cor. II 9:22 (see Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, p. 148, n. 65); Tim. II 4:6–7.

18 Apollonios of Tyana, *Letters*, ed. Kayser.

The second stance is what may be read as confessional or, occasionally, autobiographical discourse, the expression of a sinful or exulted, suffering or emotional self. There are such moments in the letters of Paul,[19] but they are much more common among the literary letters; for instance, in the love-affairs portrayed from a first-person perspective in Alkiphron and Aristainetos[20] or in the letters by Alexander the Great to his mother.[21]

As will become apparent below, similar approaches often enter the collections of "real, rhetorical" letters, sometimes with explicit referencing and appropriation of earlier biblical or literary models; the examples of letters by Theodore the Studite, Photios, Leo Choirosphaktes, and Constantine Akropolites may suffice here.[22]

3 Rhetorical Theory

Another layer of attitudes that conditioned self-representation in "real, rhetorical" letters derived from rhetorical theory pertaining to letter-writing. Such theoretical thought is evident in Byzantine manuals of rhetorical style, in the few manuals of model letters that existed, and in meta-rhetorical comments included within actual letters.[23]

As has been pointed out frequently, a commonplace in this context is the expectation and prescription that a letter is and should be an "image of the soul", namely an unmediated and authentic representation of the inner self of the letter-writer. As is posited in the earliest theoretical statements on epistolography in the Greco-Roman tradition, "every person writes the letter as an image (almost) of his own soul; and yes, it is possible to see the character of the writer in every other type of discourse, but in none so vividly as in the letter";

19 E.g., Rom. 7:14–18 or Tim. I 1:15.

20 On Alkiphron, see Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 255–307; on Aristainetos, see Bing/Höschele, *Aristaenetus*.

21 Particularly in the Byzantine version *epsilon*; see Sempéré, "Le détournement de l'épistolaire".

22 For Theodore, see the comments in one his *Vitae* (Theodore Daphnopates [?], *Life and Conduct of Theodore the Studite*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 99, col. 153B; BHG 1755); for Photios, see his Letter to Nicholas, Pope of Rome (August or September 861: *Letters*, no. 290, eds. Laourdas/Westerink, pp. 123–38); for Leo Choirosphaktes, see his Letter 19 (ed. and trans. Strano, pp. 76–79), which is full of phrases culled from Alkiphron's letters; for Constantine Akropolites, see his Letter 87 addressed to the Thessalonians, ed. Romano, pp. 176–78.

23 On Byzantine rhetorical theory, see Papaioannou, "Rhetoric and Rhetorical Theory" and id., "Theory of Literature".

or "let us say what we feel, let us feel what we say."[24] It would perhaps be superfluous to discuss here this common understanding of the letter.[25] It might be worthwhile, however, to point to an inherent tension that this definition involved. That is, although the supposition that the letter expresses the inner self truthfully was dominant, this did not preclude the important demand that the writer should also artfully construct and fashion his epistolographic image.

Excessive rhetoricality in letters was indeed often frowned upon, and writers were commended for their *idiotikon* style, namely a style that is simple, non-learned, and which resists the norms of rhetoric, and is thus also *individual*;[26] nevertheless, letter-writing was also associated with playful or fictional discourse[27] and was praised for the pleasures of its rhetoricality.[28] More importantly, it was linked with the Byzantine rhetorical exercise of *ethopoiia*, namely the composition of first-person speeches attributable to stock characters (e.g., "What would Achilles say in this or that situation" etc.).[29] As John Doxapatres put it sometime during the first half of the eleventh century, recycling early Byzantine thought on the matter, the *ethopoiia*, "trains us also for epistolary style, if indeed also in letters we must take into consideration the character of both those who send the letter and those who receive it."[30] As an aside, an extreme and remarkably self-referential case of the incorporation of *ethopoiia* in a personal letter-collection are two letters by Gregory of Cyprus that bear the titles "by the same author [i.e. Gregory] to himself as if by an-

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24 Demetrios, *On Style* 227, ed. and trans. Chiron, p. 64, l. 1–5: σχεδὸν γὰρ εἰκόνα ἕκαστος τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς γράφει τὴν ἐπιστολήν· καὶ ἔστι μὲν καὶ ἐξ ἄλλου λόγου παντὸς ἰδεῖν τὸ ἦθος τοῦ γράφοντος, ἐξ οὐδενὸς δὲ οὕτως, ὡς ἐπιστολῆς; Seneca, *Epistles* 75,4: "quod sentimus, loquamur, quod loquimur sentiamus".

25 See Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, pp. 133–35 with further bibliography.

26 See, e.g., Symeon Metaphrastes, *Life and Conduct of Theodore Graptos* 22, in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 116, cols. 669D–672A (BHG 1746).

27 See e.g. Michael Psellos, *On the Different Styles of Certain Writings*, ed. Boissonade; trans. (with discussion) Papaioannou.

28 See, as one out of countless examples, the prefatory epigram by George Akropolites on an edition of the letters of emperor Theodore II Laskaris, where both serious content (σοφῶν νοημάτων) and playful form (σχημάτων … φράσεως ἥδυσμα) are praised: George Akropolites, *Prefatory Epigram*, ed. Heisenberg, p. 9, l. 57–63.

29 See Malosse, "Éthopée et fiction épistolaire".

30 John Doxapatres, *Rhetorical Homilies on Aphthonios' Progymnasmata*, ed. Walz, p. 646, l. 2–5: καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἐπιστολικὸν ἡμᾶς γυμνάζει χαρακτῆρα, εἴγε καὶ ἐν ἐκείνῳ δεῖ τοῦ ἤθους τῶν τε ἐπιστελλόντων καὶ πρὸς οὓς ἐπιστέλλουσι, ποιεῖσθαι πρόνοιαν. Cf. Nicholas of Myra, *Progymnasmata*, ed. Felten, p. 67, l. 2, and also Ailios Theon, *Progymnasmata* 115.20–22, ed. and trans. Patillon, p. 70, as well as John of Sardis, *Commentary on Aphthonios' Progymnasmata*, ed. Rabe, p. 195, l. 27 and p. 200, l. 8. On letter-writing and *ethopoiia*, see Riehle, *Funktionen der byzantinischen Epistolographie*, pp. 259–68.

other person" (τοῦ αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ὡς ἀπ᾽ ἄλλου) and "by the same author to himself by another" (τοῦ αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ὑφ᾽ ἑτέρου).[31] Similarly, a relatively popular manual of letter-writing, attributed to either Libanios or Proklos in the manuscripts, recommended some degree of self-fashioning; in the *Types of Epistolary Style*, the future letter-writer is expected to "appear" as expressing this or that feeling: the verbs φαίνεσθαι and δοκεῖν are used frequently in the definitions of the various types of letters.[32]

Just as Byzantine readers were exposed to a large gamut of letter-writing and relevant epistolographic personae, which often co-existed in manuscripts or in libraries without any clear demarcation of fictive vs. true, playful vs. serious, entertaining vs. didactic, so also rhetorical theory offered somewhat contradictory advice, allowing both sincerity and fabrication simultaneously.

4 Publication and Manuscript Transmission

At the other end of the spectrum lay the realities of the production, reception, and circulation of letters in Byzantium. These too shaped the types of self mediated by Byzantine epistolography. For instance, letter-recipients were often alerted to whether a letter was handwritten by the author himself or dictated to someone else, as authorial authenticity was to be safeguarded by the recognizable handwriting,[33] by the private seal fastened to the letter,[34] or by

31 Gregory of Cyprus, *Letters*, nos. 48 and 50, ed. Eustratiades, pp. 197–98. Cf. the title to Gregory's *Autobiography*: Γρηγορίου τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου καὶ μακαριωτάτου οἰκουμενικοῦ πατριάρχου περὶ τοῦ καθ᾽ ἑαυτὸν βίου ὡς ἀπ᾽ ἄλλου προσώπου, ed. Lameere, p. 177 and the discussion in Kotzabassi, "Περὶ τοῦ καθ᾽ ἑαυτὸν βίου ὡς ἀπ᾽ ἄλλου προσώπου".

32 Pseudo-Libanios/Pseudo-Proklos, *Types of Epistolary Style*, ed. Foerster.

33 The terms ἰδιόχειρον and αὐτόγραφος are often used in this context; see, e.g., a remarkable story regarding a letter exchange between the living and the dead, involving Synesios of Cyrene, recorded in hagiographical contexts; see *Synaxarion of Constantinople*, June 27, ed. Delehaye, pp. 772–76 in the apparatus, based on Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Par. Coisl. 223, dated to 1300/1301: Διήγησις Συνεσίου ἐπισκόπου Κυπρίνης [sic!] περὶ Εὐαγρίου τινὸς φιλοσόφου (this synaxarial notice, we may add, can be found in a large number of manuscripts, not considered by Delehaye; see further Papaioannou, "The Philosopher's Tongue"). The story derives from John Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow* 195, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 87.3, cols. 3077–80; see also George Kedrenos, *Synopsis of Histories* 414, ed. Tartaglia, vol. 2, pp. 648–50, and further references in the relevant BHG entry (1322r).

34 Related may be the common formula (with many variations) that we encounter in Byzantine seals: Οὗ σφραγὶς εἰμί, τὴν *γραφὴν* βλέπων νόει ("Learn whose seal I am by looking at the *writing*" [which could mean anything from, primarily, the 'text' to, even, the 'handwriting']); see Wassiliou-Seibt, *Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel*, pp. 39–40.

the individual style of expression of the writer.[35] Regardless, such authenticity was to some extent compromised as soon as the letter was removed from the immediate context of the original private exchange between two people. As was noted above, letters were often read aloud to a larger group of people and circulated within a wider circle of friends and associates.[36] This potential publicity conditioned the approach of letter-writers with respect to what they might reveal about themselves. By the very nature of Byzantine letter-writing culture, the epistolographic self was inevitably always also a *public* persona.

When letter-writers, or people in their immediate circles (such as students or friends), or, even more so, later compilers (often teachers of rhetoric) created "publishable" collections of someone's letters, the drive either to de-concretize and de-individualize letters or create a certain public image of the writer or the collector came further into play. The effects of this "publication" process could lead to very different results. There are cases, for example, when letters are preserved, but the identity of their authors was falsified or lost for ever; the most famous instance of the latter is that of a professional Constantinopolitan teacher from the tenth century, whose collection survives in a contemporary manuscript (British Library Add. 36749), most likely belonging (in my view) to the teacher himself, yet whose name remains unknown.[37] From the next century, we have the different case of John Mauropous who produced his own letter-collection (this original manuscript also survives: Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 676), for which he made a selection of his letters and arranged them chronologically, but also removed the names of addressees or concrete forms of address. The intention behind the collection was thus to create both an autobiographically inflected self-representation, and a carefully crafted public image of Mauropous, somewhat stripped from the triviality of historical details.[38] Similar examples of authorially-produced letter collections may be cited both from the early and, especially, the late Byzantine period.[39]

35 See Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos' Letter B3 (ed. Tziatzi-Papagianni, pp. 87–88) to Theodore of Kyzikos, in which the emperor clarifies that, though the letter was not handwritten by him but by someone else, his authorship will be evident to those who know his personal style (χαρακτῆρα).

36 For relevant references see Chapter 13 in this volume; see also the introduction to Michael Psellos' *Letters*, ed. Papaioannou, pp. xxxv–xxxvii.

37 Anonymous professor, *Letters*, ed. Markopoulos.

38 See the introduction in John Mauropous, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 28–32; see also Bernard, *Writing and Reading*, pp. 128–48.

39 The collections of Gregory of Nazianzos (see the programmatic Letter 52, ed. Gallay, vol. 1, pp. 68–89) and Synesios of Cyrene (see his programmatic Letter 1, ed. Garzya, pp. 3–5) may be cited as examples from the early period, Nikephoros Choumnos and Demetrios

5 Exemplary Models: Typology and Autobiography

Beyond types of subjectivity in "biblical" and "literary" epistolography, beyond epistolary theory, or the realities of letter-writing practice, one factor which also dictated the genre of letter-writing and, consequently, the Byzantine epistolographic self was the epistolary canon. This canon was comprised primarily of collections of "real, rhetorical" letters produced during the first hundred years or so of the increasingly Christian Roman empire of Constantinople in the fourth and early fifth centuries; these include in particular the letters of Libanios, Gregory of Nazianzos, Basil of Caesarea, and Synesios of Cyrene, that survive in large numbers and in numerous manuscripts.[40]

A brief digression is in order here. If we approach these early epistolary corpora from the perspective of literary history, one thing that becomes immediately apparent is that we catch the history of Greek self-representation in "real, rhetorical" letter-writing *in medias res*. By the fourth century, Greek epistolographic discourse and the consequent types of self-representation were already well defined. This is manifested by recurrent common places, repeated themes, and replicated wording. The studies of, in particular, Koskenniemi (*Studien*) and Thraede (*Grundzüge*), have delineated the prehistory of these fourth-century patterns in Greek papyri, apostolic letters, and the Latin tradition.[41] Yet we cannot study their prehistory in collections of "real, rhetorical" letters as no such collection survives in Greek before the letter-corpora of Libanios, Gregory, and other contemporary writers (such as the emperor Julian, Basil's brother Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom). The sources do make reference to earlier examples – see for instance the several letter-collections by Greek writers dated prior to the fourth century AD, cited in the *Suda*[42] – yet none of these have been preserved. Whatever the case, it was the fourth-century variety of epistolary typology that was to prove influential for centuries of letter-writing practice, indeed, beyond the collapse of the Byzantine state in the fifteenth century.

Kydones from the late; on the latter two, see Riehle, "Epistolography as Autobiography" and Hatlie, "Life and Artistry". See also Chapter 17, pp. 477–89 in this volume.

40 See Papaioannou, "Fragile Literature".

41 Koskenniemi, *Studien*; Thraede, *Grundzüge*.

42 E.g., *Suda*, ed. Adler, α 528 (Adrian), 3745 (Aratus; notably his letters are listed after his *ethopoiiai*), 3918 (Aristocles), η 545 (Herodes Atticus), θ 166 (Theocritus of Chios: ἐπιστολαὶ θαυμάσιαι), λ 825 (Lycurgus). Certain texts, usually treatises, from the pre-Byzantine period do survive in epistolary form, but never as part of letter-collections per se; see, e.g., Plutarch, *Consolatio ad uxorem* (608a–612b).

We may also ask how does the fourth-century epistolary typology appear from the perspective of literary subjectivity. We are essentially dealing with the discursive formation and articulation of the elite, learned self,[43] with an added flavor of Christianity, a flavor that was bound to increase in later centuries. In this respect, the co-existence of non-Christian with Christian writers in the Byzantine epistolary canon – with Libanios (together with his student, Julian) occupying the one extreme, Basil and Gregory the other, and Synesios placed somewhere in the middle – was crucial. The Christianity of Basil, Gregory, and Synesios, however different it may have been in reality, provided later readers with the alibi for the preservation of what united these authors and their fellow non-Christian rhetoricians: their passionate devotion to Hellenism as the cultural capital of learnedness of Grecophone elite writers in the Roman Empire.

This Hellenic pedigree was not abandoned – in favor of biblical discourse, for example – by Christian learned gentlemen in later centuries, particularly in the aspects which pertained to his epistolographic production. The display of learnedness was usually an ineluctable aspect of a letter-writer's self-staging; Prokopios of Gaza, Niketas Magistros, Michael Psellos, John Tzetzes, Theodore Prodromos, Michael Choniates, and Maximos Planoudes are perhaps among the Byzantine masters of such displays, following in the footsteps of Gregory and Synesios in particular.[44] These latter two writers had also established that, in letters, rhetoric would often submit self-representation to the joys of literary playfulness – what the Byzantines called παιδιά, a core feature of the otherwise serious business of showcasing one's refined urbanity.

A simple way to map the major preoccupations of the expression of self in the Byzantine epistolary canon and its later variations would be to review the lists of commonplaces gathered in the earlier studies of Koskenniemi and Thraede, but also Tomadakes, Karlsson, Hunger, and Mullett,[45] since these commonplaces facilitated what may be regarded as different rhetorical masks of the writer's self. I will not go through these lists here, but will instead highlight anew a few of aspects of this epistolary typology that were especially conducive to self-representation.

43 See, e.g., the list of superior qualities pronounced in a letter attributed in the manuscripts to either Gregory of Nazianzos (*Letters*, no. 249.32, ed. Gallay, pp. 139–48) or Gregory of Nyssa (*Letters*, no. 1.32, ed. Pasquali, p. 12, l. 2–6; ed. and trans. Maraval, pp. 102–05): "family" (γένος), "education" (παίδευσις), "free-birth" (ἐλευθερία), and "knowledge" (γνῶσις).

44 As is well known, John Tzetzes went so far in his display of learnedness as to produce a verse commentary to his letter collection, the so-called *Chiliades* (ed. Leone).

45 Tomadakes, *Βυζαντινὴ ἐπιστολογραφία*, pp. 108–22; Karlsson, *Idéologie*; Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 214–33; Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 98–161.

What must be said at the outset is that these rhetorical masks could simultaneously enact a double effect: they exhibited one's ability to create carefully wrought objects of high verbal art to be placed within the diachrony of the *literary* tradition, but they also constructed an immediate *social* persona, positioning their writer within a complex network of friends, associates, patrons, competitors, and opponents. Literary and social objectives were mutually reinforcing, and these epistolary commonplaces offered opportunities to show, as was remarked above, that one belonged, and also excelled and differed.

Perhaps the most common such theme was part of the Byzantine rhetoric of friendship: the imagined unity between sender and addressee. Letter-writers frequently insisted on the metaphor of sharing one soul in two bodies or indeed sharing everything with the addressee, thus highlighting their deep devotion and affection for their friend; the verb ποθέω and the noun πόθος are common in epistolographic first-person discourse.[46] Occasionally, explicitly erotic discourse is employed, rendering the self a subject of desire, a μανικὸς ἐραστής as Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos wrote in the mid-tenth century.[47] This was a self-representation that not only aimed to foster social ties, but also continued an explicitly learned idiom, namely the Platonic discourse of spiritualized homoerotic desire.[48]

In the same framework of rhetoricized friendship belongs the constant interplay between self-abasement and the effusive praise of the addressee in letters, a discursive role-play between the inferior self and the superior other. Indeed, so often are Byzantine letters brief encomia of the addressee (the most

46 In Michael Choniates' letter collection, for instance – to cite just one example: Michael Choniates, *Letters*, ed. Kolovou.

47 Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *Letters*, no. B3, ed. Tziatzi-Papagianni, p. 88, l. 19. For the Byzantine rhetoric of friendship, its motifs as well as its eroticization, see Papaioannou, "Michael Psellos on Friendship", where also further bibliography. See also – to cite at least one among numerous relevant post-Psellian examples – John Apokaukos' Letter 18 that begins with an adoption of the first-person rhetoric of the *Song of Songs* (ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, p. 279) and Letter 21 (ibid., p. 285) that starts with a favorite Nazianzenic quote in the Byzantine discourse of desire: "for those who suffer from desire a single day equals an entire life" (Gregory of Nazianzos, *Oration* 24.3, ed. and trans. Mossay, pp. 42–45, l. 3–4 and *Oration* 26.2, ibid., pp. 226–29, l. 5–6: βίος ὅλος ἡμέρα μία τοῖς πόθῳ κάμνουσιν).

48 See, e.g., Libanios' self-styling as Socrates with whom "young lads were in love" (ἤρα τὰ μειράκια): *Letters*, no. 435, ed. Foerster, pp. 425–28. It may be noteworthy to add here that, in the *Types of Epistolary Style* attributed to either Libanios or Proklos, in the definition of the "erotic" epistle as that letter "through which we address words of love to our beloved" (Pseudo-Libanios/Pseudo-Proklos, *Types of Epistolary Style* 44, ed. Foerster, p. 33, l. 3–5: δι' ἧς ἐρωτικοὺς πρὸς τὰς ἐρωμένας προσφερόμεθα λόγους), some manuscripts attest the masculine form τοὺς ἐρωμένους (see the critical apparatus in Foerster's edition).

minute expression of this being the manifold encomiastic forms of address[49]) that we might argue that the most imposing "self" of rhetorical epistolography is ultimately that of the "other"; the epistolary friend was, after all, defined as an "other self" (ἄλλος ἑαυτός).[50] It is in the mirror of the other and his idealized image that the author's self hides or, in some cases, revels: this is particularly the case in instances where letter-writers placed encomia of themselves in the mouth of their addressees.[51] And, to add one more aspect to this interplay between self and other, there existed a third denominator that facilitated the epistolographic construction of selfhood: the vilification of opponents who are set against the unity that is supposed to bind correspondents. Two notable examples are Synesios' self-defense and simultaneous character assassination of Andronikos, a local governor of Pentapolis in several letters,[52] and Leo Choirosphaktes' own epistolary self-defense as well as invective of an effeminate eunuch.[53]

Among these often stylized personae we also encounter autobiographical discourse: short, or occasionally extensive, stories about oneself. There are letters that narrate and describe, for instance, experiences of travel, various types of suffering such as exile, illness, or death, or glimpses of one's inner life, such as dreams.[54] There are some spectacular examples in this field, such as Synesios' letter to his brother Euoptios about his adventurous travel along the north African coast;[55] Theodore the Studite's letter about his exile;[56] a letter

49 Surveyed in Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede*.

50 The most influential statement is in Synesios' Letter 100 (ed. Garzya, pp. 168–69), where the expression is attributed to Pythagoras; see further Papaioannou, "Language Games" for a particularly playful expansion of this notion in a letter by Michael Italikos (twelfth century).

51 E.g., Gregory of Nyssa, *Letters*, no. 19, ed. Pasquali, pp. 62–68; ed. and trans. Maraval, pp. 242–57 or Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 13a, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 26–32; the fact that the letter-collection of a writer sometimes also contained encomiastic letters by others addressed to him might have served a similar function; see, e.g., a letter by Anastasios Quaestor to Leo Choirosphaktes preserved in the latter's collection (*Letters*, no. 23, ed. and trans. Strano, p. 89), where Leo is called "Orpheus, Odysseus, Nestor" ("τὸν ἡμέτερον Ὀρφέα καὶ Ὀδυσσέα καὶ Νέστορα").

52 *Letters*, nos. 41, 42 and 79, ed. Garzya, pp. 52–75, 138–45.

53 *Letters*, no. 20, ed. and trans. Strano, pp. 78–85; see the discussion in Messis, *Les eunuques*, pp. 214–15.

54 For overviews of the Byzantine discourse on these subjects (with several examples from letter-writing), see Mullett, "In Peril on the Sea" (travel); ead., *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 102–11 (illness) and 248–61 (exile); Angelidi/Calofonos, *Dreaming* (dreams).

55 *Letters*, no. 5, ed. Garzya, pp. 11–26. For a brief survey of Synesios' "autobiographically" constructed epistolary self in general, see Roques, "Introduction", pp. lxxxiv–xcv with Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, pp. 210–14.

56 *Letters*, no. 3, ed. Fatouros, vol. 1, pp. 11–16.

describing a wet dream in Theodore Daphnopates' collection;[57] Psellos' description of the births of his grandson and of a close friend's son;[58] Theodore Prodromos' self-sarcastic description of a stubborn malady;[59] Michael Choniates' mourning of the death of his nephew's young son;[60] or moving letters by Constantine Akropolites on the deaths of his child and of his brother, as well as his exceptionally detailed descriptions of an accident caused by a horse, and a frightening evening during an earthquake.[61]

To add a final element to this brief study, a concomitant feature of the wider autobiographical effect pursued in Byzantine letters is the insistent return to various types of emotion. It would require a separate study to survey these types in any detail. Here, let us simply highlight what is perhaps the most common context for the expression of emotion: the recording of the emotionally intense reception of a letter.

> How often have I brought the letter to my lips, as mothers embrace their children? How often have I clung to it with those lips, as though I were embracing a dearest lover of mine? How often have I addressed and kissed even the superscription which had been signed by your own hand as though by a clear seal, and then fixed my eyes on it, as if clasping the fingers of that sacred right hand of yours through the imprint of the letters?

Such descriptions as this, in a letter attributed to Julian, are common.[62] They convey a wider belief or desire or, indeed, fantasy: the letter, with its materiality and its world of words, functioned, or was expected to function, as a proxy

57 *Letters*, no. 17, eds. and trans. Darrouzès/Westerink, pp. 168–71.

58 *Letters*, nos. 51 and 128, ed. Papaioannou.

59 *Letters*, nos. 4 and 5, ed. and trans. Op de Coul, pp. 89–100.

60 *Letters*, nos. 88–89 and, especially, 100–101, ed. Kolovou, pp. 115–17, 133–53.

61 *Letters*, nos. 47–48 (child), 56–57 (brother), 24 (accident), 55 and 59 (earthquake), ed. Romano, pp. 142–44, 151–53, 124–26, 149–51, and 153–55.

62 *Letters*, no. 77 to Iamblichos, ed. and trans. Wright, pp. 246–252 (edition and translation revised): Ὁσάκις μὲν τῷ στόματι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν προσήγαγον, ὥσπερ αἱ μητέρες τὰ παιδία περιπλέκονται; Ὁσάκις δὲ ἐνέφυν τῷ στόματι καθάπερ ἐρωμένην ἐμαυτοῦ φιλτάτην ἀσπαζόμενος; Ὁσάκις δὲ τὴν ἐπιγραφὴν αὐτήν, ᾗ χειρὶ σῇ καθάπερ ἐναργεῖ σφραγῖδι ἐσεσημήναντο, προσειπὼν καὶ φιλήσας, εἶτα ἐπέβαλον τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς, οἱονεὶ τοῖς τῆς ἱερᾶς ἐκείνης δεξιᾶς δακτύλοις τῷ τῶν γραμμάτων ἴχνει προσπεφυκώς; For further examples see Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 16, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, pp. 41–44; Theodore Prodromos, *Letters*, no. 2, ed. and trans. Op de Coul; Eumathios Makrembolites, *Letter to Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites*, ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, to be read together with Makrembolites' *Hysmine et Hysminias* 9,10, ed. Marcovich, pp. 113–14; or Constantine Akropolites, *Letters*, no. 23, ed. Romano, pp. 123–24.

for the self. In other words, within the Byzantine epistolographic imaginary, the letter often *was* the self.

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CHAPTER 13

The Letter in the *Theatron*: Epistolary Voice, Character, and Soul (and Their Audience)

Niels Gaul

> I received your most esteemed letter and read it not only on my own, but only initially on my own: having admired it I convened the council [*boule*] as a *theatron* for your letter. Many of those who did not sit on the council flowed in, too, in full knowledge of the reason for our convention; once your words were put forth some jumped, others paled, a third group blushed, and yet others stooped towards the ground.[1]

> We made a serious effort to have your letter read before as many people as you would wish … And this is just what happened. For the entire audience applauded and was full of admiration as the letter was read by its grandfather,[2] who was unable to conceal his own pleasure as the *theatron* was shaken by applause and by praise for the sophist whose teaching turned you into such a great rhetor. But this made him blush so much that he was scarcely able to continue.[3]

1 Libanios, *Letters*, no. 1259, ed. Foerster, vol. 11, p. 333, l. 15–p. 334, l. 2: ἔλαβον σου καὶ αὐτὸς τὴν πλείστου ἀξίαν ἐπιστολὴν καὶ ἀνέγνων οὐ μόνος, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον μόνος, θαυμάσας δὲ καὶ θέατρον καθίζω τοῖς γράμμασι τὴν βουλήν. πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ τῶν οὐ βουλευόντων ἐπέρρεον γνόντες, ἐφ᾽ ὅτῳ γε συγκαθιζοίμεθα, δεικνυμένων δὲ τῶν γεγραμμένων οἱ μὲν ἐπήδων, οἱ δὲ ὠχρίων, οἱ δὲ ἠρυθρίων, οἱ δὲ εἰς γῆν ἔκυπτον. Discussed by Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, p. 210. Translations from the Greek are my own unless otherwise noted.

2 The author's teacher; the author being the letter's father.

3 Manuel II Palaiologos, *Letters*, no. 9, ed. and trans. Dennis, pp. 24–25, l. 1–9 (translation modified): ἐπὶ τοσούτων σοι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἀναγνωσθῆναι σπουδὴν πεποιήμεθα ἐφ᾽ ὅσων γε καὶ ἐβούλου … ὃ καὶ ἐξέβη. τοσοῦτοι γὰρ αὐτὴν ἐκρότουν καὶ διὰ θαύματος ἦγον ὅσοιπερ ἀκηκόασιν ἀναγινωσκομένης παρὰ τοῦ ταύτης πάππου, ᾧ καὶ κρύπτειν μὲν τὴν ἡδονὴν οὐκ ἐξῆν τοῦ θεάτρου σειομένου καὶ εὐφημούντων τὸν σοφιστὴν παρ᾽ ὃν φοιτῶν τοιόσδε ῥήτωρ γεγένησαι, ὑπὸ δὲ τοῦ ἄγαν ἐρυθριᾶν σχεδὸν χωρεῖν οὐχ οἷός τε ἦν. A hierarchy is likely to be implied from sophist, usually somewhat negatively connotated, to rhetor.

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These two quotes which span a millennium between them, with one taken from late antiquity and the other from the last decades of the Byzantine empire, testify to the importance of "literary *theatron*" (λογικὸν θέατρον) – or "literary recital", as was recently suggested[4] – in late Roman and Byzantine literary culture. A *theatron* in the present sense occasioned the performance of a rhetorical composition, frequently a letter, before an audience in a specific setting, often under the auspices of a high-ranking patron or patroness; the spectrum ranged from a friendly reading circle to competitive performances before the emperor. While such *theatra* retained ample theatricality and in many respects are the closest Byzantine equivalent of theater, this chapter prefers to offer the term *theatron* in transliteration in order to differentiate such (public) readings of rhetoric from staged, scenic performances.[5] It briefly surveys the concept and practice of literary, or rhetorical, *theatron* before looking at "theatrical"[6] performances of letters more closely.

1 A Short History of the *Theatron*: Shifting Parameters of Performance

Rhetorical *theatron* emerged over the course of late antiquity; its rise was tied into highly competitive and mobile deuterosophistic performance culture.[7] As Eunapios remarked about Libanios, "in addition to his [public] orations he would confidently undertake and easily compose certain other works more suited towards 'theatrical' pleasure".[8] Theater buildings began housing rhetorical performances, particularly of the so-called *meletai* ("declamations") of the travelling sophists who, on the theater stage, "through gesture and voice, almost imitated the dramatic action of a show: the reader could, therefore, turn into an actor sometimes".[9] The term *theatron* was thence transferred to lecturing,

4 Bourbouhakis, "Rhetoric and Performance", p. 181.

5 For previous literature see, e.g., Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel I*, pp. 335–56; Cavallo, *Lire*, pp. 57–66 = *Leggere*, pp. 73–86; Bernard, *Writing and Reading*, pp. 96–101; Bourbouhakis, "Rhetoric and Performance"; Marciniak, "Byzantine *Theatron*"; and for the Palaiologan period Medvedev, "*Theatra* as Form of Communication", now superseded by Toth, "Rhetorical *Theatron*"; Ryder, *Demetrius Kydones*, pp. 137–38 or Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, pp. 17–53.

6 Similarly, I place the adjective "theatrical" in quotation marks when referring to the Byzantine *theatron*.

7 Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, pp. 23–40; Schmitz, *Wissen und Macht*, pp. 197–231.

8 Eunapios, *Lives of the Philosophers* 16.2.7, ed. Giangrande, p. 84: καὶ παρὰ τοὺς λόγους ἕτερά τινα συντολμῆσαι καὶ ῥᾳδιουργῆσαι πρὸς τέρψιν θεατρικωτέραν; trans. Wright, pp. 525–27 (modified).

9 Cavallo, "Places of Public Reading", p. 153; see also Schouler, "Sophistes et le théâtre", pp. 275–77; Connolly, "Reclaiming the Theatrical"; Capano, "Μελέτη come fenomeno teatrale pubblico".

teaching, and assembly halls in public buildings suitable for rhetorical performances, such as *odeia* (originally, rooms for musical performances or competitions) or, as in the opening quotation, Antioch's city hall (*bouleuterion*).[10] The latter possessed "a covered *theatron* and four colonnades, which surrounded a courtyard that had been turned into a garden" with different kinds of trees.[11] Thus, possibly, the string of limestone rooms recently discovered in ancient Alexandria, or those attested for fourth-century Berytos (Beirut) qualify the description:[12] commonly, there seems to have been a fixed chair (*thronos*) for the rhetor/*didaskalos* at the far wall opposite the entrance and rows of seats, one above the other, for the students along the walls. Apses held statues of Muses, heroes, poets, philosophers, sophists, and/or former students.[13] For the Kom el-Dikka complex, Bagnall proposes that there were reading stands in the middle of a few auditoria (if that is what they were).[14] Finally, the term denoted small *theatra* in the lodgings of deutero- and late antique sophists: Eunapios speaks of "private theaters" (ἰδιωτικὰ θέατρα).[15] Himerios exemplifies this transition, narratively performing his return from the *theatra* of the large cities to his own, small "*theatron* of the Muses", in which he had acquired, and was now teaching, rhetoric:

> Come, then, since I have met with you here again for rhetorical purposes after having contended in many great *theatra*, let me address this small

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10 Korenjak, *Publikum und Redner*, pp. 27–33.

11 Libanios, *Orations*, no. 22, § 31, ed. Foerster, vol. 2, p. 487, l. 15–p. 488, l. 8: τοῦτ᾽ αὐτοῖς τοῦ βουλευτηρίου μετέδωκεν, οὗ θέατρον ὑπωρόφιον, στοαὶ δὲ τέτταρες αὐλὴν αὐτῶν ἐν μέσῳ ποιοῦσαι εἰς κῆπον βεβιασμένην, ἀμπέλους ⟨ἔχοντα⟩, συκᾶς, δένδρα ἕτερα [...]; trans. Cribiore, "Spaces for Teaching", p. 146. On the size of audiences Schmitz, *Wissen und Macht*, pp. 160–68; Korenjak, *Publikum und Redner*, pp. 42–46; Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, p. 20.

12 On the Kom el-Dikka rooms as auditoria see Derda/Markiewicz/Wipszycka, *Alexandria*, and especially Majcherek, "Late Roman Auditoria", and McKenzie, "Place in Late Antique Alexandria". However, not all archaeologists and ancient historians agree with this interpretation; I am grateful to my colleague, Prof. Judith Barringer, for sharing her observations. Multi-purpose use of these rooms – as teaching and dining rooms – is of course also a possibility. Beirut's *auditoria legum*, destroyed in 525 according to Agathias (*History* 2.15.1–4, ed. Keydell, p. 59, l. 20–p. 60, l. 7), are mentioned in the anonymous mid-fourth century *Description of the Entire World* (ed. Woodman, p. 6, l. 110–12): *post ipsam Berytus, civitas valde deliciosa et auditoria legum habens, per quam omnia iudicia Romanorum stare videntur.*

13 Cribiore, "Spaces for Teaching", pp. 146–47 and ead., *School of Libanius*, pp. 43–47.

14 Bagnall, "Introduction", p. 4.

15 Eunapios, *Lives of the Philosophers* 9.1.4–6, ed. Giangrande, p. 483; cf. Philostratos, *Lives of the Sophists* 604 = 2.21, ed. Stefec, p. 113, l. 7–13.

> one. O precinct of the Muses and of Hermes! O sacred and most lovely place, which first welcomed the fruits of my eloquence.[16]

There is no doubt that epistolography became closely tied into "theatrical" performance culture; most major letter collections of late antiquity make mention of this, such as in a well-known passage from the correspondence of Synesios:

> A man from Phykous … has brought me a letter with your name inscribed on it. I read it with pleasure and admiration: for it was worthy of the first through the friendly disposition of your soul; and the second through the beauty of your language. I therefore organized a Hellenic *theatron* in Libya,[17] and announced to them to come as listeners of an eloquent letter. And now Pylamenes, the creator of this divine letter, is [considered] great in our towns [i.e., the Pentapolis].[18]

Alternatively and in the absence of a formal *theatron*, a letter could be carried, by three friends of the addressee, "through the whole city" (πᾶσαν … τὴν πόλιν) and be shown "to those well-disposed" to the latter "and to those who are not".[19]

Rhetorical *theatra* are attested through the early sixth century but then seem to have fallen into oblivion during the period of transition from the polycentric cultural world of the late antique Roman empire to the Constantinopolicentric

16 Himerios, *Orations*, no. 64, ed. Colonna, p. 231, l. 24–29: φέρε οὖν ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν πολλοῖς καὶ μεγάλοις θεάτροις ἀθλήσαντες πάλιν ἐνταῦθα ἐπὶ τοὺς λόγους συνήλθομεν, τὸ μικρὸν τοῦτο προσείπωμεν θέατρον. ὦ Μουσῶν καὶ Ἑρμοῦ τέμενος· ὦ χωρίον ἱερὸν καὶ κάλλιστον, καὶ τὰς ἡμετέρας τῶν λόγων ὠδῖνας πρῶτον δεξάμενον, trans. Penella, pp. 139–40 (modified); summarized by Cribiore, *School of Libanius,* p. 45.

17 According to Cavallo, "Places of Public Reading", p. 153, the Πανελλήνιον mentioned in l. 73 refers to a specific building whereas Roques, *Synésios de Cyrène: Correspondance*, vol. 3, pp. 357–58, n. 37 assumes a literary circle in the Pentapolis. The latter seems more likely, see, e.g., Psellos, *Letters*, no. 497, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 922, l. 32–34.

18 Synesios, *Letters*, no. 101, ed. Garzya, trans. Roques, vol. 3, p. 224, l. 2–9: Φυκούντιος ἄνθρωπος … ἐπέδωκέ μοι φέρων ἐπιστολὴν τὸ σὸν ἐπιγεγραμμένην ὄνομα. ταύτην ἀνέγνων ἡδέως ἅμα καὶ ἀγαμένως· ὠφείλετο γὰρ τὸ μὲν τῇ διαθέσει τῆς ψυχῆς, τὸ δὲ τῷ κάλλει τῆς γλώττης. καὶ δῆτα παρεσκεύασά σοι θέατρον ἐπὶ Λιβύης Ἑλληνικόν, ἀπαγγείλας ἥκειν ἀκροασάμενοις ἐλλογίμων γραμμάτων. καὶ νῦν ἐν ταῖς παρ' ἡμῖν πόλεσιν ὁ Πυλαιμένης πολύς, ὁ δημιουργὸς τῆς θεσπεσίας ἐπιστολῆς; partially trans. Cameron, "Correspondence of Symmachus", pp. 88–89 (modified).

19 Libanios, *Letters*, no. 1004 (to Symmachos), ed. Foerster, vol. 11, p. 133, l. 2–5 = *Letters*, no. 177, ed. and trans. Norman, vol. 2, p. 386: τοῖς ἡδέως ἔχουσι πρὸς ἡμᾶς δεικνύειν καὶ τοῖς οὐχ οὕτω; trans. Cameron, "Correspondence of Symmachus", pp. 89–90.

middle Byzantine empire.[20] It remains an open question to which degree, if at all, rhetorical performances between the end of late antiquity and the tenth/eleventh centuries, which certainly existed in the ecclesial sphere but otherwise, even at the emperor's court, only at a considerably reduced scale,[21] were conceptualized as *theatra*. Occurrences of the term *theatron* during these centuries seem to denote almost exclusively (games in) the Constantinopolitan hippodrome – the city had possessed at least four *theatra* before the fifth century[22] – or mime plays, i.e., practices frowned upon by the church.[23] Down to the rule of Leo VI (r. 886–912) and beyond, homilies remained the predominant performative genre; there is certainly no mention of "theatrical" performances in the *Book of Ceremonies* with its otherwise fair share of theatrics. Epistolography of the ninth and tenth centuries remains generally silent with regard to its performative setup. There seems to be indirect evidence at best that letters were read to (small) audiences: in a rather politicized context, Theodore Stoudites collectively addressed groups of addressees and, on other occasions, turned to a second recipient mid-letter, apparently assuming the latter's presence on the scene.

The term *theatron* as a referent to recitals of letters and rhetorical compositions before an audience, appears to have fully resurfaced in the eleventh century. This reappearance and rise of "theatrical" performance was arguably tied into the emergence of a new, often provincial and town-based, "middling" stratum from roughly the tenth century onward, when the empire was expanding towards its medieval apex;[24] this time, the practice was to survive to the end of the Eastern Roman empire in the fifteenth century. For the sons of this social stratum, acquiring and performing *paideia* became one of the

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20 Prokopios of Gaza, *Letters*, no. 91, ed. Amato, p. 368; Aeneas of Gaza, *Letters*, no. 16, ed. Massa Positano, p. 47; see also *Letters*, no. 7, p. 43, and Cavallo, "Places of Public Reading", pp. 153–54; Cameron, "Correspondence of Symmachus", p. 89.

21 See Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication*, pp. 42–64; White, *Performing Orthodox Ritual*, pp. 58–61; Cunningham, "Dramatic Device". Generally on this shift, Cameron, "Byzantium and the Past in the Seventh Century". Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel I*, pp. 247–48 makes a strong case that before the mid-eleventh century, imperial orations were "short and underdeveloped".

22 Malineau, "L'apport de l'Apologie", p. 161, n. 45.

23 One transitory instance, that seems to herald the shift from spectacle to literary *theatron*, is attested in Constantine Sikeliotes' apologetic verses against those who accused him of calumniating against Leo the *mathematikos* after the latter's death (vv. 36–46, especially v. 41, ed. Spadaro, "Composizioni di Costantino il Filosofo", p. 201). For another relatively early instance (901) see Arethas, *Dinner-table Oration for Epiphany*, ed. Westerink, p. 35, l. 15.

24 See Gaul, "Rising Elites and Institutionalization", pp. 243–58.

means, if not the most promising way, of advancing their careers. Unlike in late antiquity with its visible connection to theater buildings and theatrical settings, the practice now metonymically provided the name for the apparently more flexible venues in which such gatherings were convened; as a matter of fact, in most cases we have no information as to the locality of a *theatron*. With time, all occasions that included the performance of rhetoric came to be perceived as "theatrical" one way or other, presumably including the famous boat trip up the Bosphorus culminating in verse and prose performances which the eleventh-century "Anonymous Sola" describes.[25] It is thus not always possible to distinguish between *theatra* and other kinds of reading circles to which the sources refer by various terms, such as *kyklos* (especially for the middle Byzantine period); *syllogos* (a more technical term often applied to gatherings of an official character); or *choros* (often denoting the circle of disciples around a distinguished teacher/scholar).[26] In the absence of any such key term, the phrase "in the middle" or "into the middle" provides a reliable indicator for a "theatrical" performance. This is exemplified by a passage from the very end of the Komnenian period, in Euthymios Tornikes' imperial oration to Emperor Alexios III Angelos (r. 1195–1203), which conveniently equates both:

> For my eagerness encourages this audacity, which prepared me rather to spend my time with imperial encomia – for I love the autocrator and am well-disposed towards our lord and emperor – and in famous and great *theatra* I certainly put on a performance and placed myself in the midst of all about to "commemorate to song" the emperor's achievements.[27]

By contrast, the phrase τὰ μέσα φεύγειν signals a withdrawal from public life.[28]

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25 Anonymous Sola, *Poem* I, vv. 34–39, ed. Sola, pp. 20–21; see also Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, pp. 55–56 and Bernard, *Writing and Reading*, p. 99.

26 Mullett, "Aristocracy and Patronage", p. 176.

27 Euthymios Tornikes, *Orations*, no. 1, § 3, ed. Darrouzès, p. 58, l. 23–28: παραμυθεῖται γάρ μοι τὴν τόλμαν ταύτην τὸ πρόθυμον, ὅ με καὶ μᾶλλον τοῖς βασιλικοῖς ἐγκωμίοις – εἰμὶ γάρ πως φιλαυτοκράτωρ καὶ περὶ τὸν ἡμέτερον δεσπότην καὶ βασιλέα εὐνοϊκός – ἐνευκαιρεῖν παρεσκεύασε, καὶ θεάτροις οὕτω δὴ λαμπροῖς καὶ μεγάλοις ἐνθεατρίζομαι καὶ μέσος ἔστηκα πάντων, τοῦ βασιλέως ὑμνηγορήσων τὰ κατορθώματα; partially trans. Bourbouhakis, "Rhetoric and Performance", p. 181 (modified).

28 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 5, ed. Karpozilos, p. 51, l. 3: ἡμᾶς […] τὰ μέσα φεύγειν ἐσπουδακότας. This shortcut for "public life" and, more specifically, participation in "theatrical" performances hails back to phrases like Plato's more extensive (*Gorgias*, 485d) φεύγοντι τὰ μέσα τῆς πόλεως καὶ τὰς ἀγοράς, ἐν αἷς ἔφη ὁ ποιητὴς τοὺς ἄνδρας ἀριπρεπεῖς γίγνεσθαι, who in turn evokes *Iliad* 9, 441.

While by and large the structure and virtual hierarchy of *theatra* seem to have consolidated over time, such gatherings could also be convened on the spur of the moment, formed ad hoc of those assembled for various purposes in the house of a friend, patron or magnate, or in the imperial palace, if the occasion arose upon the reception of a letter. Such ad hoc events allow the practice to be tied into notions of patronage, networking, and, most importantly, everyday exchanges and politics, and open the possibility of a more flexible system in which a *theatron* consisted of those accidentally, or not so accidentally ("clientele"), present, as is seen in the following example:

> Just at that time when your letter arrived most of the learned gentlemen [of Constantinople] were, perchance, assembled in my house, who were astonished when listening to the nobility of mind innate to your letter; then the beauty of its composition and the grace and wit following your character, and they praised the city of the Thessalonians to no small measure of her possession, [saying that] you are her only learned treasure and the best whetstone among the learned tongues of that city with regard to rhetorical performance. And we too were delighted to no small measure because you did not fail our hopes, but granted us to find a friend capable in all respects and more excellent than anyone could have hoped.[29]

2 The Letter in the *Theatron*: Performance and Patronage

Letters lent themselves to such "theatrical" performance:[30] they were "intimate and confidential and intended for publication",[31] i.e., circulating both orally and in writing.[32] While in the fourth century Libanios had still feigned unease

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29 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, no. 142 (to Thomas Magistros), ed. Leone, vol. 2, p. 348, l. 10–18: ἔτυχον γὰρ ἡμῖν καὶ τῶν ἐλλογίμων τηνικαῦτα παρακαταθήμενοι πλεῖστοι, οἳ δὴ καὶ τεθαυμάκασιν ἀκηκοότες τὴν τοῖς γράμμασιν ἐγκειμένην τῆς διανοίας εὐγένειαν, τότε τῆς συνθήκης κάλλος καὶ τὴν τῷ ἤθει ἐφέρπουσαν χάριν καὶ ἀστειότητα, καὶ ἐμακάρισαν οὐ μετρίως τὴν Θεσσαλονικέων τοῦ κτήματος· σὲ γὰρ εἶναι καὶ μόνον τὸν λογικὸν αὐτῆς ὀφθαλμὸν καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸ λέγειν ἀρίστην ἀκόνην τῶν ἐλλογίμων ταύτης γλωσσῶν. ἥσθημεν δὲ καὶ ἡμεῖς οὐ μετρίως ὅτι τῶν ἐλπίδων ἡμᾶς οὐκ ἔψευσας, ἀλλ᾽ ἔδωκας φίλου τυχεῖν ἀγαθοῦ τὰ πάντα καὶ κρείττονος ἢ κατὰ τὰς ἐλπίδας. Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, pp. 45–46.

30 Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 210–12; more recently Papaioannou, "Letter-writing", p. 192.

31 Morey/Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot*, p. 13, cited in Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 16. The moment of performance in the *theatron* was, of course, just one moment in the wider context of ritualized communication; see Chapter 11 in this volume.

32 On these processes see also Chapter 17, pp. 477–89 in this volume.

at the very practices which he had no qualms to inflict on others,[33] post-tenth century Byzantine letters that came to be transferred into manuscripts and thus preserved for posterity were usually conceived from the start with a "theatrical" audience in mind. In this second part, this chapter traces the letter's fate once it came to the *theatron*, as it were, and looks at four aspects in particular: How was the letter given a voice?[34] What did audiences expect to encounter in a letter thus "voiced"? Which reaction was expected from the audience? And to what degree, finally, was all this influenced by social hierarchy?

Among the many genres of Byzantine rhetoric geared towards performance, the letter occupies a special position. It was the only genre which depended on an "alien" voice to fully realize its rhetorical potential in performance: be this the voice of its carrier, its addressee, or a reader appointed by the latter. In most other cases an "author-orator"[35] could trust that he would bring his own script to life at least during an inaugural performance – oral "publishing", as it were – although on later occasions these, too, circulated beyond the author's control. At the same time, the author of a letter was not directly exposed to the addressee's and audience's reaction, but only indirectly so, usually in form of written "feedback". This "alienation" could of course be quietly glossed over; in an oft-quoted passage Michael Italikos put emphasis on the acoustic beauty of a letter, and – assigning a merely auxiliary function to its herald (*keryx*) – ascribed its voice (*phthongos*) and melody (*melos*) exclusively to the (absent) author:

> When your letter was given to the *logikon theatron* and unfolded, it gave forth a voice and melody – o Logoi, Muse, and refined rhetoric – such that I cannot describe its force or quality: how it sang, how it delighted, how it caused inspiration through pleasure. If not the temperance of its melody, the steadiness of its rhythm and the fairness of its diction had restrained us, we should all have been filled with enthusiasm, both the letter's proclaimer and those who listened to its proclamation.[36]

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33 Cameron, "Correspondence of Symmachus", p. 89.

34 Gaul, "Voicing and Gesturing Emotions".

35 Bourbouhakis, "Rhetoric and Performance", p. 176.

36 Michael Italikos, *Letters*, no. 17, ed. Gautier, p. 154, l. 8–14: εἰς γὰρ λογικὸν θέατρον δοθεῖσα ἡ ἐπιστολὴ καὶ ἀνελιχθεῖσα φθόγγον ἀφῆκε καὶ μέλος, ὦ λόγοι καὶ Μοῦσα καὶ ῥητορεία κομψή, οὐκ οἶδα ὁπόσον καὶ οἷον, ὡς ᾖσεν, ὡς ὤνησεν, ὡς ἔνθους ὑφ᾽ ἡδονῆς ἀπειργάσατο. εἰ δὲ μὴ κατεῖχε τὸ σῶφρον τοῦ μέλους καὶ τὸ στάσιμον τοῦ ῥυθμοῦ καὶ τὸ εὐπρεπὲς τῆς λέξεως κορυβάντων ἂν ἐνεπλήσθημεν καὶ ὁ τοῦ γράμματος κῆρυξ καὶ οἱ τῶν κηρυγμάτων ἀκροαταί. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for prompting a fresh look at this passage, which is also translated in Mullett, "Aristocracy and Patronage", p. 175 and Bourbouhakis, "Rhetoric and Performance", pp. 180–81, and suggesting an elegant solution.

Italikos suggested that the "voice" filling the *theatron* was the author's, rather than the performer's, song. It charmed even the herald whose performance skills seemingly made no difference to the letter's success. A century earlier, and less diplomatically, Michael Psellos had explicitly addressed this "dilemma" of a borrowed voice when writing to his relative Pothos:

> For your letter was handed to me in the evening hours, and the timing did not permit me to approach the emperor's palace. At first light I immediately made my way with animate and just spirit about you to the ruler. And just as the rhetors in Athens, when they opened deliberations with the magistrates, pressed for the topics of their own choosing, in this manner I, too, implored the emperor about your letter first. And immediately by agreement many supported me in this matter and the introducer of your letter[37] read your letter to the emperor. The groups on both sides of the imperial dais chimed in regarding your affairs, each with something else, following me as if I were the leader of a tragical discourse, because I played up to your plight, acting the drama in voice more beautifully than you, the writer, did in your letter, going through all your misfortunes in precise detail and with much emotion.[38]

Unlike Italikos, Psellos claimed greater effect for his own performance as well as choreography – which had Pothos's uncle, a *droungarios*, publicly burst into tears – than he was prepared to ascribe to the author's epistolary voice. While the two passages seem to espouse a remarkably different attitude to the relevance of the author's vs. the performer's voice, this is most likely due to underlying issues of social hierarchy: Italikos is writing to the "most divine *kaisar*"

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37 The reader might be whoever had initially carried Pothos's letter (as Jeffreys/Lauxtermann, *Letters of Michael Psellos*, p. 187 suggest) or Psellos himself, referring to himself in the third person, as the anonymous reviewer suggests.

38 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 217, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 2, p. 582, l. 21–35: Ἑσπέρας μὲν γὰρ τὸ σὸν γράμμα ἐνεχειρίσθη μοι· καὶ ὁ καιρὸς οὐκ ἐδίδου τὴν εἰς τὰ βασίλεια ἄφιξιν. Οὔπω δὲ ἕως ὑπέφαινε, καὶ ἡμεῖς αὐτίκα ἐμψύχῳ καὶ δικαίῳ θυμῷ περὶ σοῦ ἐς τὸν κρατοῦντα ἐξιππασάμεθα. Καὶ ὥσπερ οἱ Ἀθήνησι ῥήτορες τοῖς πρυτάνεσι, περὶ ὧν αὐτοὶ προῄρηνται, πρώτως χρηματίζοντες προὔτρεπον, οὕτω δὴ κἀγώ σοι τῷ βασιλεῖ περὶ πρώτου τοῦ σοῦ ἐδεόμην γράμματος. Καὶ αὐτίκα πολλοὶ ἐκ συνθήματος εἰς τὸ αὐτό μοι συνεκπεπνεύκεσαν· καὶ ὁ μὲν γραμματοεισαγωγεὺς τὸ πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα σου γράμμα ὑπανεγίνωσκεν, αἱ δ' ἐφ' ἑκάτερα μερίδες τοῦ βασιλείου βήματος ἄλλος ἄλλο τι τῶν περὶ σοῦ συνεφόρει, ἐμοὶ καθάπερ ἡγεμόνι τῆς τραγικῆς ἑπόμενοι διαλέξεως, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἀκριβῶς ὑπετραγῴδησά σοι τὸ πάθος, κάλλιον ἐν γλώττῃ τὸ δρᾶμα ὑποκριθείς, ἢ σὺ ὁ γράψας ἐν γράμμασι, καὶ πάντα σοι τὰ συμβεβηκότα ἐπιδραμὼν ἀκριβῶς καὶ περιπαθῶς. On this letter see now Jeffreys/Lauxtermann, *Letters of Michael Psellos*, pp. 186–87. Part of this passage is also translated and discussed in Chapter 11, pp. 321–22 of this volume.

(θειότατε καῖσαρ, l. 1) Nikephoros Bryennios, and is keen on flattering the latter and thus has no interest in differentiating between the author's and the performer's voice, whereas Psellos was intent on emphasizing his own role in Pothos's improved fortunes.

Finally, one needs to allow for an altogether different scenario. While in the preceding examples the public recitation of the letter constituted the highlight of the *theatron*, occasionally the *grammatephoros*, *komistes* or, as Psellos called it above, *grammatoeisagogeus* could literally steal the show, as John Mauropous reports, with his tongue in his cheek:

> "A candle at high noon" is as superfluous as irrigation from a well is superfluous in the middle of winter and letters are equally superfluous when they happen to have a loquacious and talkative carrier. The truth of this statement will be clearly attested by this messenger, because the letters he brings will no longer have a chance to talk, once he begins to speak of his own affairs at length. Therefore, set aside these voiceless syllables [i.e., this letter] to receive the living voice and lend your ears completely to this marvelous orator so that you may not waste so much water in vain, seeing that it is summer season and the heat that hangs over us becomes stifling and the use of water is indispensable for everything – if indeed he would prefer to speak by the water-clock rather than to speak by the 'wine-clock'. Let him commence his usual long speech; as for me, having extended my letter to this point, I hand over the rest to the flowing force of his tongue.[39]

While this took Psellos's insistence on the significance of live performance to the ultimate level, a passage in a letter Nikephoros Choumnos sent to the *protasekretis* Leo Bardales shifts emphasis to a related yet different concept:

39 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 2, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 44–47 (translation modified): περιττὸν μὲν λύχνος ἐν μεσημβρίᾳ, περιττὴ δὲ μέσου χειμῶνος ἡ ἐκ φρεάτων ἀρδεία, περιττὰ δὲ τὰ γράμματα πολυφώνου καὶ λάλου τυχόντα τοῦ κομιστοῦ. ὅτι δ' ἀληθῆ τὰ τῆς γνώμης, μαρτυρήσει σαφῶς ὁ τοῖς παροῦσι διακονῶν· οὐκέτι γὰρ χώρα παρρησίας αὐτοῖς, ἐπειδὰν οὗτος ἄρξηται μακρηγορεῖν τὰ οἰκεῖα. τῶν ἀφώνων οὖν τούτων ἀποστὰς συλλαβῶν, τὰς ἐμψύχους δέχου φωνάς, καὶ τῷ θαυμαστῷ δημηγόρῳ τὰς ἀκοὰς ὅλας δίδου, ὡς μὴ μάτην τοσοῦτον ἀναλίσκοις τὸ ὕδωρ. θέρους ὥρᾳ, καὶ ταῦτα καὶ τοσούτου πνίγους ἐπικειμένου, ὅταν ἡ τοῦ ὕδατος χρῆσις ἀναγκαιοτάτη πρὸς ἅπαντα, εἴγε δὴ καὶ πρὸς ὕδωρ, ἀλλὰ μὴ μᾶλλον πρὸς οἶνον δημηγορεῖν αὐτὸς ἕλοιτο. ὁ μὲν οὖν ἀρχέσθω τῆς συνήθους μακρολογίας, ἡμεῖς δ' ἄχρι τούτου τὴν γραφὴν παρατείναντες τὸ ἐντεῦθεν τῇ ῥύμῃ τῆς ἐκείνου γλώττης παραχωροῦμεν.

> I received the letter which you sent to us, who had asked for it, not so much for reasons of necessity as of ambition [i.e., in order to show off]. For it knew to show forth every aspect of beauty. I for one did not know which of its features to praise first, or rather, which above all other: the easy flow of thoughts so cleverly organized and all appearing equally admirable? The harmony and precision of expression? The rhythm? Or composition before rhythm? Or above all else that which caught me more than everything, the beauty of its character [*ethos*], creating the letter with a soul, as it were, so that you did not seem to lead the conversation with paper and ink but in person, communicating with your living voice.[40]

This passage brings epistolary representation of rhetorical character (*ethos*, or *tropoi*) to the fore,[41] which from the eleventh century onwards regained a significant role. Again Psellos is our most outspoken witness, who perceived the court, the capital and its various *theatra* as a stage on which to perform – literally as an actor (*tragodos*) – and display one's *ethos*, and whose project was thus somewhat exceptional.[42] Yet the notion was more widespread, as is testified in John Mauropous's "this letter bears witness to the character of your friend".[43] It can be traced through the contemporary revival of rhetorical theory, and back to antiquity.[44] Such "character" amounts to more than the Hermogenian figure of *ethos*; hailing back to Aristotle, it rather refers to a befitting underlying image of the author's character (μίμησις ἤθους ὑποκειμένου προσώπου, in Aphthonios's phrasing; συμμορφάζεσθαι γὰρ ἀνάγκη τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις προσώποις, as John Sikeliotes put it, or, in Maximos Planoudes' words, ἦθος τὸ ἁρμόττον τῷ

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40 Nikephoros Choumnos, *Letters*, no. 78, l. 4–15, ed. Boissonade, pp. 94–95: τὴν ἐπιστολὴν δεξάμενος, ἣν οὐ κατὰ χρείαν μᾶλλον ἢ φιλοτιμίαν αἰτησαμένοις ἡμῖν ἔπεμψας. εἶχε γάρ, ὡς ἐν βραχεῖ φάναι, καλῶν εἶδος ἅπαν ἐν ἑαυτῇ δεικνῦσα· κἀγὼ δ᾽ οὐκ εἶχον ὅτι πρῶτον ἢ μάλιστα τῶν αὐτῆς ἐπαινέσομαι, πότερον τὴν τῶν νοημάτων εὐπορίαν οὕτω πυκνῶν καὶ θαυμαστῶν πάντων ὁμοίως φαινομένων, ἢ τὴν ἁρμονίαν ἢ τὴν ἀκρίβειαν τῶν ὀνομάτων, ἢ τὸν ῥυθμόν, ἢ πρὸ τοῦ ῥυθμοῦ τὴν συνθήκην, ἢ πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων πάντων, ὅ με καὶ πλέον τῶν ἄλλων εἶλε, τὸ τοῦ ἤθους καλόν, ἔμπνουν, ὡς εἰπεῖν, τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἐργαζόμενον, ὡς μηδ᾽ ἐν χάρτῃ σε δοκεῖν μᾶλλον καὶ μέλανι τὴν ὁμιλίαν, ἀλλ᾽ αὐτοπρόσωπον ποιεῖσθαι, ζώσῃ φωνῇ προσδιαλεγόμενον.

41 For more detail see Chapter 12 in this volume; see also Gregoras's passage above, p. 359 at n. 29.

42 Although in *Letters*, nos. 27 and 224, eds. Kurtz/Drexl, he opted to "refuse the demands of spectacle of theater and resist this type of mimesis" (Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, p. 108).

43 John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 42, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 136–37: μαρτυρεῖ σοι γοῦν τὰ παρόντα τὸ ἦθος τοῦ φίλου; discussed in detail by Papaioannou, "Letter-writing", p. 192.

44 On the revival of rhetorical theory in the eleventh century, Magdalino, "From 'Encyclopedism' to 'Humanism'"; Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*; for antiquity, Hall, "Lawcourt Dramas"; Duncan, *Performance and Identity*, pp. 58–89.

ὑποκειμένῳ προσώπῳ) geared towards public display and matched to the situation, thus lending plausibility to his words.[45] The practice was related to the progymnasmatic practice of *ethopoiia* ("performance of character"), which trained students to stay in role when pretending to speak from the viewpoint of a (fictional) character, allowing for "animated", i.e., *empsychos*, performance of character.[46] The advice Psellos sent to his friend and former teacher, Mauropous, when the latter hoped to return from (honorary) exile in Euchaita, is remarkable in its emphasis on the situational display of *ethos* in both writing as well as physical enactment:

> I do not know if I by myself am the reason for receiving such letters from you, my holy head, or if you and your *ethos* have changed under the [recent] difficulties … For I have never encountered any man, especially among those practicing philosophy, who, with regard to his *ethos*, is like you august at the same time as Socratic, and not too common or solely ironic, but mixed from both and most balanced with regard to the harmony of the soul … But you who have come here and who is present on the imperial dais, rein in your frown and change your *ethos* and do not make threats, that you are upset and ready to abandon your metropolis, and demands the premises of your words … Do you see how, far away from the stage,[47] I, the tragedian,[48] shape and form you as I fear that you will somehow enter [into the emperor's presence] without suitable performance or perish for making the performance apparent?[49]

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45 Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1395b12–19 [2.21.16] and 1408a25–36 [3.7.6–7], ed. Kassel, pp. 121, 159–60; cf. also 1356a1–13 [1.2.3–4], pp. 9–10. Aphthonios, *Progymnasmata*, 11.1, ed. and trans. Patillon, p. 144, l. 1–2; John Sikeliotes, *Commentary on Hermogenes*, ed. Walz, vol. 6, p. 482, l. 21–p. 483, l. 1; Maximos Planoudes, *Commentary on Hermogenes*, ed. Walz, vol. 5, p. 527, l. 11–12. See also Demetrios, *On Style*, §§ 223–35, ed. and trans. Chiron, pp. 63–66, trans. Innes, pp. 477–83.

46 Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, pp. 107–13; Gaul, "Rising Elites and Institutionalization", pp. 259–69; Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance*, pp. 145–52. See also Amato/Schamps, *Ethopoiia*.

47 I.e., the imperial dais.

48 Compare above, p. 361 at n. 38, where Psellos likened his performance to "tragical discourse" (τραγικῆς … διαλέξεως).

49 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 168, ed. Papaioannou vol. 1, p. 445, l. 1–3; p. 445, l. 14–p. 446, l. 18; p. 447, l. 37–40 and 43–45: Οὐκ οἶδα πότερον αὐτὸς ἐμαυτῷ γίνομαι αἴτιος, τοῦ δέχεσθαι παρὰ σοῦ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἐμοὶ κεφαλῆς τοιαύτας ἐπιστολάς, ἢ σὺ καὶ τὸ σὸν ἦθος ὑπὸ τῶν πραγμάτων μεταβληθέν· … οὐδενὶ γὰρ πώποτε τῶν πάντων ἀνδρῶν ἐγὼ ἐντετύχηκα, καὶ μάλιστα τῶν φιλοσοφεῖν ἐσπουδακότων, οἷος δὴ σὺ τὸ ἦθος, σεμνὸς ὁμοῦ καὶ Σωκρατικός, καὶ οὔτε κοινὸς ἄγαν, οὔτε μόνως εἰρωνικός, ἀλλ' ἀμφοτέρωθεν κεκραμένος, καὶ τὴν ἁρμονίαν τῆς ψυχῆς δικαιότατος … Σὺ δὲ εἰσεληλυθὼς ἐνταῦθα καὶ τοῦ βήματος γεγονώς, δέσμησον τὰς ὀφρῦς καὶ τὸ ἦθος ἀλλοίωσον, καὶ ὑποθέσεις τοῖς λόγοις ὑπόβαλε: τὰ τῶν ἐπηρειῶν, τὰ τῶν ἀπαιτήσεων,

Epistolary/rhetorical character – almost reflecting the modern sociological notion of habitus – served as a means of social distinction as well as a lubricant among the elites, as when Gregoras and Magistros struck an epistolary connection around the passage quoted above,[50] they felt comfortable in doing so as shared learning implied shared habitus.[51] Not least that this notion of character made audible is closely tied into the metaphor of the letter as an "image of the soul",[52] which Choumnos hinted at, too. This image beautifully captures the closeness and presence letters were expected to create with the audience: on her deathbed Andrew Libadenos's mother kissed the letters he had sent from his journeys and asked to be buried with some of them.[53] And yet for all this emphasis on character and plausibility, an audience did not expect that the *ethos* underlying a rhetorical composition would necessarily proclaim the truth: Theodore Metochites was well aware of the constraints that kept a man from speaking his mind openly.[54]

We have already seen that a "theatrical" setting was immediate and, frequently, intimate as there was no stage, nor was it possible to dim lights; the mise-en-scène – with the author-orator placed "in the middle" – invited acoustic and gestural interaction between performer and audience on the one hand, and among members of the audience over and around the performer, to the latter's advantage or disadvantage, on the other.[55] The élite nature of rhetorical production and performance entailed that today's author would be tomorrow's listener, and vice-versa, to the effect that "the readership of Byzantine literature was no wider than its audience, an audience comprising the sum of all contemporary *theatra*".[56] In a striking passage, Psellos discusses the reinvigorating effect of writing that comes from intimacy with a specific audience, and testifies to intellectual as well as physical interaction: inspiration on the one hand, visible applause etc. on the other. The passage seems to assume

ὡς ἠνίασαι, καὶ ἕτοιμος φυγεῖν τὴν μητρόπολιν … Ὁρᾷς ὅπως πόρρω σε τῆς σκηνῆς ὁ τραγῳδὸς ἐγὼ σχηματίζω καὶ διαπλάττω, φοβούμενος μήπως ἀνυπόκριτος ἔλθῃς, ἢ διαφθείρῃς φανεὶς τὴν ὑπόκρισιν; See also Jeffreys/Lauxtermann, *Letters of Michael Psellos*, pp. 275–76.

50 See above, p. 359 at n. 29.

51 Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, pp. 39–46 and *passim*; Riehle, "Epistolography, Social Exchange".

52 Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial*, pp. 94–96; Riehle, "Epistolary Voices"; the idea is already present in Demetrios, *On Style*, § 227, ed. and trans. Chiron, p. 64.

53 Andrew Libadenos, *Geographical Description*, ed. Lampsides, p. 56, l. 3–11; I owe this passage to Annika Asp.

54 Theodore Metochites, *Essays*, no. 9, ed. Hult, pp. 88–95. For a discussion see Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, pp. 38–39.

55 Korenjak, *Publikum und Redner*, pp. 68–149.

56 Mullett, "Aristocracy and Patronage", pp. 179–80, quote on p. 180.

the author's physical presence, but forms part of a letter to Constantine, the nephew of Michael Keroularios:

> If indeed the listener strengthens the power of the one displaying the beauty of his words, how could the rhetor's display not increase accordingly? When I am in the middle of a large *theatron*, as I exhibit theatrically the beauty of my words, busy with the harmonious composition of the parts of speech, my rhythm is patterned in this or that fashion after the ears and gestures of my listeners, whether idle or aroused and receptive.[57] When I create my speech with you as a listener, something more happens to me: I become inspired, I am raised with the winged figure of your soul, your signifying look and joyous smile, I display more graceful charms in response to your innate and unpretentious ones.[58]

Elsewhere, in his unique praise of the *anagnostes* John Kroustoulas, Psellos described how skillful reading attracted a crowd and discussed its effects on the audience.[59] Typical physical reactions an audience was expected to display could be gauged from Libanios's letter quoted at the outset, which ranged from blushing via paling and jumping to stooping.[60] It seems that practices of applauding did not change much through the centuries: clapping one's hands, stamping one's feet, and jumping up from one's seat remained the preferred methods of expressing appreciation.[61] As Theodore Metochites famously alleged against Nikephoros Choumnos:

57 On the role of voice vs. gestures in middle Byzantine performance culture see Gaul, "Voicing and Gesturing Emotions".

58 Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 123, ed. Papaioannou, vol. 1, p. 301, l. 22–33 (trans. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, p. 228): Εἰ δὲ καὶ τῷ ἐπιδεικνυμένῳ τὴν ὥραν τοῦ λόγου ὁ ἀκροατὴς ἐπιρωννύει τὴν δύναμιν, πῶς οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἡ ἐπίδειξις κατὰ λόγον χωρήσει τῷ ῥήτορι; Ἔγωγ᾽ οὖν ἐν μέσῳ θεάτρου πολλοῦ, αὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο θεατρίζων τὸ κάλλος τῶν λέξεων, καὶ περὶ τὴν ἐμμελῆ συνθήκην τῶν μερῶν τοῦ λόγου πραγματευόμενος, πρὸς τὰ τῶν ἀκροατῶν ὦτα καὶ σχήματα, εἴτε κατερραθυμημένα εἴη, εἴτε διεγηγερμένα καὶ δόκιμα, οὕτως ἢ ἐκείνως μεταρρυθμίζομαι. Ὑπὸ σοὶ δὲ μᾶλλον ἀκροατῇ τοὺς λόγους ποιούμενος, ἔνθους τε γίνομαι, καὶ συνεπαίρομαί σοι τῷ ἐπτερωμένῳ σχήματι τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ τῷ σημαίνοντί σοι τοῦ βλέμματος, καὶ τῷ γεγηθότι τοῦ μειδιάματος, καὶ ταῖς ἐμφύτοις καὶ ἀπροσποιήτοις χάρισι, χαριεστέρας σοι καὶ αὐτὸς τὰς τῶν λόγων ἀντεπιδείκνυμι χάριτας.

59 Psellos, *Orations*, no. 37, ed. Littlewood, pp. 137–51; trans. Papaioannou in Barber/Papaioannou, *Psellos on Literature and Art*, pp. 218–44; see Gaul, "Voicing and Gesturing Emotions".

60 See above, p. 353 at n. 1.

61 Korenjak, *Publikum und Redner*, pp. 87–95; Gaul, "Performative Reading".

> You convoke *theatra* for your own sake, calling together men of presently great reputation, who listen to your ever so great wisdom and your [intellectual] prowess and over-boldness against Plato and those other men of old with great names. And you yourself sit amidst those men [amidst your own *theatron*], and while your texts are being read, you indulge in orgiastic celebration and you applaud [your own texts] with manifold unpleasant gestures, soon jumping up from your stool, soon collapsing and contracting [on it, performing] all [possible] gestures and bending of your head and neck, and manifold twisting and turnings of your body, going mad and offering [many] occasions of laughter and much to talk about to the listeners and spectators, when they would later leave your *theatron*.[62]

This passage comes from the context of polemics and must be read *cum grano salis*, but it acutely conveys the thin line between acceptable und unacceptable gesturing. On a different note, one would like to know if the late antique ceremonial upon arrival of an (official) letter from the emperor – treated as if it were the emperor's sacred person himself – was still observed in later Byzantine periods; the sources remain silent on the issue, yet there is no doubt that various Byzantine emperors corresponded in various formats with their subjects, although few imperial letters survive.[63]

To return finally to the quote from Manuel II Palaiologos's letter which opened this chapter,[64] the passage given at the outset continues as follows:

> But while the others seemed to be expressing their wonderment, I seemed to be the only one who was not doing so. Someone asked me how it could be possible that among the entire group I alone appeared unaffected, that is, uninspired and lacking in admiration. "I too am greatly impressed", I replied, "for I cannot help being thoroughly amazed, not because a noble father brings forth noble children", referring to you and

62 Theodore Metochites, *Orations*, no. 14, § 27, ed. Ševčenko, *Études sur la polémique*, p. 253, l. 1–11: καὶ θέατρα συγκαλεῖς ἑαυτῷ καὶ τοὺς νῦν ἐλλογίμους, ἀκροασαμένους τῆς σῆς μεγίστης σοφίας καὶ κράτους καὶ τόλμης κατὰ Πλάτωνος καὶ τῶν παλαιῶν ἐκείνων μεγαλωνύμων ἀνδρῶν· καὶ μέσος προκαθήμενος, ἀναγινωσκομένων τῶν σῶν, ὀργιάζεις καὶ ἐπικροτεῖς παντοίοις ἀηδίας σχήμασι, νῦν μὲν ἀναπηδῶν τοῦ σκίμποδος, νῦν δὲ συμπίπτων καὶ συνιζάνων καὶ χειρονομίαις πάσαις καὶ κεφαλῆς κλίσεσι καὶ αὐχένος, καὶ στροφαῖς καὶ ἀντιστροφαῖς παντοίαις τοῦ σώματος, ἐξοιστρούμενος καὶ γέλωτος ἀφορμὰς καὶ πλείστην διατριβὴν τοῖς λόγοις ἔπειθ᾽ ὕστερον ἐξιοῦσιν ἀπὸ σοῦ τοῖς ἀκροαταῖς τε καὶ θεαταῖς παρέχων.

63 Elm, *Sons of Hellenism*, pp. 69–70; Matthews, *Laying Down*, pp. 186–99; see also Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, pp. 73–117; Price, *Rituals*, pp. 87–100; and Chapter 7 in this volume.

64 See above, p. 353 at n. 3.

> your writings, "but because the rest of you marvel at this as though you had unexpectedly come across something new". This is what I said, and I seemed to hit the mark, inasmuch as it brought the group to admire the very man whom I wanted to be admired.[65]

This amply demonstrates how Manuel Palaiologos managed to bestow cultural capital on the candidate of his choice, the author of the letter as opposed to the latter's teacher who read the letter publicly in the emperor's *theatron*. One may assume similar strategies at play on other occasions as well, or more overt statements of approval or, indeed, disapproval: for performances in the *theatron* could fail, resulting in a loss of cultural capital for the performer.[66] However, such situations are rather not attested in epistolographical exchanges which tend to focus on congratulating an author on the success of his letter.

The Byzantine rhetorical *theatron* remained a fluid concept: originating from its spatial association with theatrical buildings in late antiquity, the act of public performance before an audience became the defining criterion now bestowing the name on a variety of occasions – ranging from playful performances within a circle of friends to orations before the emperor – and locations, as long as a performer stepped into the middle.

Once in the *theatron*, the letter was expected to transmit – in addition to gifts and the intellectual joy of solving rhetorical puzzles – the absent author's voice, character, and soul, with Byzantine epistolographers purposely blurring the line between the author's and the reader's voice, depending on the specific context. However, in the world of the Byzantine *theatron*, each such epistolary display of character also resulted in a judgement by the audience and patrons.

65 Manuel II Palaiologos, *Letters*, no. 9, ed. and trans. Dennis, pp. 24–25, l. 11–19: εἷς δὲ μόνος αὐτὸς ἐν θαυμάζουσιν οὐ τοῦτ᾽ ἐφάνην ποιῶν, καί τινος ἐρομένου τί δήποθ᾽ ἂν εἴη τὸ μόνον μὲ τῶν πάντων ποιοῦν μὴ ταὐτὰ τοῖς ἅπασι πάσχειν· ἔνθουν λέγω καθορᾶσθαι καὶ ἐκπλήξεως γέμοντα. "ἐκπλήττομαί γε", ἔφην, "κἀγώ· δεῖ μὲ γὰρ τῷ ὄντι ἐκπλήξει συνέχεσθαι, οὐχ ὡς γενναῖος γενναίους τέκοι παῖδας πατήρ" – σὲ δὴ λέγων καὶ ἅπερ γράφεις – "ἀλλ᾽ ὅθ᾽ ὑμεῖς ἀξιοῦτε τουτὶ θαυμάζειν ὡς δὴ παρὰ προσδοκίαν ἰδόντες τι καινόν." ταῦτ᾽ ἔφην ἐγὼ καὶ ἔδοξά τι λέγειν, ἀνθ᾽ ὧν θαυμάζειν μᾶλλον τούτοις ἐπῄει ὃν θαυμάζεσθαι ἐβουλόμην.

66 Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, pp. 31, 33–34.

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CHAPTER 14

Letters and Letter Exchange in Byzantine Art

Cecily J. Hilsdale

1 Introduction

As the primary means of conveying information across cultures, letters played a prominent role in the political life of the Byzantine Empire and the wider medieval world. Despite their importance, it can be difficult to make larger claims about Byzantine letters as so few originals or reliable copies survive.[1] Fortunately, this fragmentary material record is complemented by images of letters in Byzantine art, which have much to tell us about the social form, function, and perception of letters in Byzantine culture. Moreover, while visual representations help to elucidate the role of letters in Byzantium, attention to letters and letter exchange in Byzantine art serves not merely as a recuperative exercise to complement a lost archive but also constitutes an interpretive strategy in and of itself. In particular, as this essay will show, the depiction of letters often facilitates narrative coherence by providing an explicit and recurring visual motif around which a complex narrative can be organized.

It is necessary, however, to proceed with caution because a letter, charter, chrysobull, or petition could all be represented as a scroll in Byzantine art.[2] In other words, it can be difficult to distinguish between different types of correspondence or even to identify letters at all. Imperial portraiture typically depicts the emperor holding a scroll-like object in one hand, which usually signifies not a letter but the symbol of authority known as the *akakia*, the descendent of the late antique *mappa*.[3] In some instances the scroll can be identified instead as a rolled document or letter. One such instance appears on the east wall of the south gallery of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople where a celebrated mosaic panel represents the Macedonian imperial couple holding their monetary offering to the Great Church (Fig. 14.1). Here the empress holds a scroll meant to represent the text that documents the donation itself, which is pictured as a sack of coinage in the emperor's hands. The white scroll held

1 See Chapters 7 and 17, pp. 477–90 in this volume.

2 The visual ambiguity here parallels the diversity of the terminology used to designate letters, on which see the Introduction, pp. 6–7 and Chapter 7, pp. 203–04 in this volume.

3 Note that the *akakia* is typically red. See Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images*, p. 32.

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FIGURE 14.1 Constantine IX Monomachos and Zoe with Christ, south gallery mosaics, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople
PHOTO: CECILY J. HILSDALE

by the empress even includes legible crimson letters naming the emperor so as to make its documentary value explicit.[4] It should thus be understood as a chrysobull, the letter documenting the imperial donation.

4 Oikonomides, "The Mosaic Panel of Constantine IX and Zoe". The Macedonian imperial couple is but one of a suite of imperial images of donation on the east wall of the south gallery. Directly next to the mosaic representing Constantine IX Monomachos and Zoe with Christ, the mosaic of John II Komnenos and Eirene with the Virgin and Child echoes the

Chrysobulls themselves were adorned with the imperial effigy in the early Palaiologan period.[5] Three extant illuminated chrysobulls are associated with Andronikos II (r. 1282–1328), including one granting and extending the privileges of the Metropolitan of Monembasia in 1301.[6] This particular example is composed of four vellum sheets, reaching a total length of nearly 80 inches. Bearing the emperor's signature in deep red ink at the bottom of the document, this chrysobull commences with a miniature of Andronikos offering to Christ a rolled white scroll meant to reference the chrysobull itself. In this way the miniature depicts the act of donating the very scroll that bears both the visual and the textual attestation of the privileges. The imperial portrait on Palaiologan chrysobulls such as this solidifies the emperor's gift in a legal manner while simultaneously transforming the viewer into a witness of the transaction.[7]

This and similar chrysobulls, which can be considered letters, broadly construed, point to the public dimension of letters in Byzantium. One of the miniatures of the illustrated copy of Skylitzes' *Synopsis historiarum* in Madrid, a book discussed at greater length below, further illustrates this public role of letters. It shows the reading aloud of an imperial chrysobull before troops and thus points to the potentially performative function of epistolary communication.[8] In addition to their performance, letters could also be transformed and commemorated. For example, the texts of a number of Andronikos's chrysobulls

basic formal arrangement of the former. The scroll in Zoe's hand names Constantine – the name as well as other significant mosaic details having been changed – whereas Eirene's scroll is simply tied with a red cord.

5 Heisenberg, *Aus der Geschichte und Literatur der Palaiologenzeit*, pp. 25–33, Velmans, "Le portrait dans l'art des Paléologues", pp. 184–89, and, more recently, Cutler, "Legal Iconicity" and Carr, "Three Illuminated Chrysobulls". On chrysobulls more generally, see Müller, "Imperial Chrysobulls".

6 It is currently housed in the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens. See Evangelatou/Papastavrou/Skotti, *Byzantium*, pp. 144–46 (cat. no. 53). In addition to the one in Athens, the other extant chrysobulls of Andronikos II include one issued to the see of Kanina in Albania in 1307 (now in the Morgan Library in New York), and a third that, based on its iconography, was probably issued for the church of the Helkomenos in Monembasia. See Alexander, "A Chrysobull", Kavrus-Hoffmann, "Catalogue of Greek Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts", pp. 112–16, and Carr, "Three Illuminated Chrysobulls".

7 Cutler, "Legal Iconicity", pp. 65–79. On the image of the emperor and the gift in the Palaiologan period more broadly, see Hilsdale, *Byzantine Art and Diplomacy*.

8 Fol. 125v is reproduced in Tsamakda, *The Illustrated Chronicle*, fig. 293 with commentary at p. 161. This manuscript and its visual program is discussed below as my first case study. On the public performance of letters see also Chapter 13 in this volume.

were copied into the vaults of a chapel of the Hodegetria in Mistra.[9] This material translation from letter to fresco – and from personal and portable to monumental and permanent – underscores the prestige associated with an imperial letter promulgated from the capital. Such instances underscore the potency of the letter to serve as a material manifestation of the sender that held social value beyond the level of communication alone.[10]

Given the public importance of letters – the way they could be shared, performed publicly and transformed into monumental works – one approach to letters and letter exchange in Byzantine art might focus on chrysobulls in particular, illustrated examples as well as representations and remediations of them. My approach here, however, is different. I focus instead on letters and letter delivery as representational strategies that consolidate visual narratives. Letters and their exchange feature prominently in Byzantine pictorial programs involving diplomacy and cross-cultural interaction, where they serve as key formal devices to advance the story line and to organize the narrative. In what follows, three case studies showcase this strategy: the illustrated copy of Skylitzes' historical work in Madrid, the Alexander Romance now in Venice, and the poem conventionally known as the *Epithalamion* in the Vatican. The three unique manuscripts under investigation represent diverse centers of production (Sicily, Constantinople, and Trebizond) and different genres of writing (historiography, romance, and vernacular poetry). But their visual programs all capitalize on the rhetorical force of the letter for narrative cohesion and dynamism. Taken together, these manuscripts reveal the potential of the letter as a strategy for Byzantine artists to present diplomatic activity in brief and also to unfold complicated narratives effectively and eloquently.

2 The Madrid Skylitzes: Letters and the Historical Narrative

Given the relationship between epistolography and diplomacy, it should come as no surprise that the exchange of letters features prominently in Byzantium's

9 Carr, "Three Illuminated Chrysobulls", pp. 458–59. On the phenomenon of transferring documents to walls of Byzantine churches, see Kalopissi-Verti, "Church Inscriptions as Documents".

10 In his important study of "object-conversion", Buc reminds us about the German afterlife of a letter from emperor Constantine IX Monomachos. Salian emperor Henry III's donation to the church of Saints Simon and Jude in Goslar includes relics, ars sacra, and a letter from the Byzantine emperor, the imperial seal of which, he specified, should be melted down for a chalice while the letter itself be kept intact for use as an altar cloth. See Buc, "Conversion of Objects", p. 100.

only surviving illustrated historical chronicle in Greek, the copy of Skylitzes' *Synopsis historiarum* in Madrid (Biblioteca Nacional de España, Matritensis Vitr. 26–2).[11] Throughout the pages of this massive volume, containing 574 miniatures over 233 folios, letters appear frequently, and they connect the Byzantine emperor visually to leaders of a wide array of peoples, often serving as an abbreviation for diplomatic engagement and even allegiance in certain instances. In this way, letter exchange constitutes the imperial interface with the wider medieval world – allegiances are brokered and broken by the letter.

Many of the Madrid Skylitzes' scenes show a letter being presented to the emperor who is depicted enthroned, as on folio 109r where Leo VI, seated within a schematic rendering of the imperial palace, receives a letter from the Bulgarian delegation. As a sign of deference, the Bulgarian envoy bows slightly as he hands the emperor the scroll.[12] It is equally common, however, for the miniatures to condense the correspondence between two rulers into a single scene through continuous narration, a compositional formula in which figures are repeated so as to convey subsequent temporal moments. This point is illustrated well by the miniature on folio 210r representing the widow of the emir of Egypt sending a letter to Michael IV (Fig. 14.2).[13] On the far left hand side of the page, the widow sits cross-legged with another figure within an architectural setting and hands a letter – a rolled scroll – to a messenger who leans in from the right to receive it. The same messenger, recognizable by dress and physique, is repeated on the right hand side of the same scene offering the letter to the emperor, who appears enthroned holding a scepter within an architectural edifice marked by a cross at the summit of one of its towers. Here the doubling of the messenger and the scroll suggests the passage of time and distance in the conveyance of the message.

This visual formula is repeated throughout the Madrid Skylitzes. Members of a delegation of Croats and Serbs on folio 96r, for example, are shown on the left-hand side of the page receiving a letter, and are then repeated on the right delivering it to Basil I.[14] Often the intermediary stages in the transfer of the

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11 John Skylitzes' *Chronicle* (ed. Thurn, trans. Wortley) covers Byzantine history from 811–1057. On the Madrid copy of Skylitzes' chronicle, see Estopañan, *Skylitzes Matritensis*, Grabar/Manoussacas, *L'illustration du manuscrit de Skylitzès*, Evans/Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium*, pp. 501–02, and more recently Tsamakda, *Illustrated Chronicle* and "Historical Writing", pp. 121–25, Boeck, "Un-Orthodox Imagery" and ead., *Imagining the Byzantine Past*.

12 Tsamakda, *Illustrated Chronicle*, p. 143, fig. 246. Fol. 118v echoes this formula (Tsamakda, fig. 273). On fol. 78r (top) where Michael III receives a message (Tsamakda, fig. 190), the message is delivered by Byzantine courtiers (indicated by their dress) rather than foreign ambassadors.

13 Tsamakda, *Illustrated Chronicle*, p. 235, fig. 496.

14 Ibid., pp. 131–32, fig. 216.

FIGURE 14.2 Madrid Skylitzes. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Matritensis Vitr. 26–2, fol. 210r: the widow of the emir of Egypt sends a letter to Michael IV
PHOTO: BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE ESPAÑA

letter are further elaborated. On folio 67v, for instance, two messengers take a letter from the leader of the Bulgarians on the left and hand that letter to Empress Theodora on the right, and two horses are tied to a tree at the center of the exchange so as to suggest the great distance traversed by the messengers.[15]

The miniature on folio 75v, depicting the exchange of a letter between Byzantine Emperor Theophilos and Caliph al-Mamun, further exposes the productivity of the letter to convey continuous narration (Fig. 14.3).[16] The two rulers are situated in similarly rendered sumptuous tents, the emperor on the left and the caliph on the right. Between them a messenger is represented three times in slightly different postures so as to indicate three distinct moments in the exchange: receiving, carrying, and offering the letter. While the letter bearer appears in triplicate, the sender and receiver remain solitary figures dictating the action. This visual formula of repetition for continuous narration is the norm throughout the manuscript. Even the depiction of the letter of Christ to Abgar of Edessa assumes this basic compositional configuration with the critical exception that the hands conveying the letter are veiled so as to indicate its sanctity (fol. 205r).[17] In some scenes, such as on folios 143v to 144r, the epistolary exchange is spread out over multiple miniatures. In the first image on the verso of folio 143, a letter is handed to an envoy, only to be received in the next scene on folio 144r.[18] The norm, however, is as described above where the exchange is combined into a single scene and depicted through continuous narration. Moreover, this standard compositional formula is not reserved for letters alone. The transfer of relics (fol. 207v), money (fol. 211v) and even poison (fol. 138v) adopt the basic configuration where the sender and recipient are represented as single pendants framing the transfer, which is denoted by the repetition of the envoy and the object.

Although letters are occasionally associated with secrecy in the manuscript,[19] they are predominantly represented as public and serve as a means of proclaiming diplomatic allegiance. Letter exchange in this manuscript, as

15 On fol. 67v: ibid., pp. 112–13, fig. 168. Note that the captions identifying Boris and Theodora are reversed. Horses accompany the delivery of letters on fol. 19v (also tethered to a tree), fol. 162v and fol. 230r.

16 Ibid., p. 118, fig. 184.

17 On fol. 205r: ibid., pp. 231–32, fig. 487.

18 Ibid., p. 184, fig. 352–353.

19 Regarding the secrecy of letters, one could think of the conspiracy represented on fol. 110r where two men secretly record the conversation between Samonas and Basil and their clandestine report is then read aloud in the next scene (Tsamakda, *Illustrated Chronicle*, pp. 144–45, figs. 249–250). Furthermore, Mullett, "The Language of Diplomacy", p. 204, points out that Leo the Philosopher, who is represented on fol. 75r, reads al-Mamun's letter in secret.

FIGURE 14.3 Madrid Skylitzes. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Matritensis Vitr. 26–2, fol. 75v: the exchange of a letter between Theophilos and al-Mamun
PHOTO: BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE ESPAÑA

Margaret Mullett has pointed out, serves as shorthand for diplomatic activity.[20] Furthermore, in most of the examples already cited letter exchange suggests peace: the Croats and Serbs submit themselves with their letter, that of the widow of the emir of Egypt secures peace with the emperor, and the Bulgarian's letter renews a truce with Byzantium. Through the exchange of letters, the visual program of the Madrid Skylitzes suggests, allegiances are forged.

By contrast, the rejection of a letter constitutes a breach of protocol and signifies war. Folios 225v to 226r concern the unsuccessful diplomatic engagement between Constantine IX Monomachos and Vladimir of Kiev.[21] On folio 225v, the two rulers are shown enthroned on each side of the miniature; on the left the emperor hands a letter to two messengers who are repeated standing in front of Vladimir on the right. The text informs us that the emperor's plea for peace was rejected: Vladimir humiliated the envoys and sent them away. On the next page, the escalation of that antagonism is elaborated visually. The upper scene on folio 226r shows confronting naval forces and the lower scene shows further diplomatic negotiations. This lower scene depicts the two rulers enthroned again. The Byzantine emperor hands a letter to two envoys, who are represented two more times: in the center they hold the letter and proceed to the right and then farther to the right handing the letter to Vladimir, who turns his head away from them forcefully and dramatically. This rejection of the emperor's letter signifies his rejection of the emperor's plea for peace.

Throughout the Madrid Skylitzes, the depiction of letter exchange encapsulates diplomatic relations between the Byzantines and other rulers – the Abbasid caliph (fol. 75v) and the widow of the caliph of Egypt (fol. 210r) for example, or delegations of Croats, Serbs, and Bulgarians (fols. 96r and 109r).[22] The miniatures depicting these exchanges emphasize the brokering of allegiance through the delivery and the exchange of information via letters. By contrast, rarely does the manuscript depict the composition or reading of letters.[23] In this illustrated history letters primarily concern official matters of state: they promote diplomatic agendas, and their dispatch, reception, or rejection directly impact matters of war and peace.

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20 Mullett, "The Language of Diplomacy", p. 204. Mullett astutely notes the emphasis in the Madrid Skylitzes "on ceremony, on the transaction, on the public nature of letter exchange, on the social and political importance of communication" (p. 205).

21 Tsamakda, *Illustrated Chronicle*, p. 251, fig. 535–36.

22 It should be noted that epistolary activity is not reserved for secular rulers: on fol. 211r, the manuscript depicts Patriarch Alexios sending a letter to bishop Demetrios of Kyzikos (ibid., p. 236, fig. 498).

23 Mullett, "The Language of Diplomacy", p. 204, also points this out.

3 The Alexander Romance: Letters and the Romance Narrative

Like the Madrid Skylitzes, the copy of the Alexander Romance now housed in the Hellenic Institute in Venice (Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini, Gr. 5) is densely illustrated and is also the only extant fully illuminated Greek copy of its particular text and genre.[24] In contrast to the illustrated Skylitzes, however, the Venice manuscript offers a much broader series of contexts for epistolography. With the move from historical writing with the Madrid Skylitzes, where the letter encapsulates diplomatic activity, to romance with this book, the depiction of letters and letter exchange takes on a more nuanced rhetorical role. Specifically, in addition to dispatching and delivering letters, in the Venice Alexander Romance we frequently see letters also composed and read. This more detailed treatment of epistolary activity in the visual program is appropriate given that large portions of textual accounts of Alexander's exploits are conveyed as the text of letters.[25] For example, the encounter between Alexander and the Amazons occurs almost entirely through letter exchange – their correspondence is only minimally framed by third-person narration. To convey the epistolographic character of the story, the illustrations of the Romance offer an extended series of miniatures showing the composition, dispatch, delivery, and display of letters between the two parties. In this way, we see an elaboration on the epistolary process and the myriad bureaucratic intermediaries involved.

The Venice Alexander Romance was produced in Trebizond in the fourteenth century and its frontispiece preserves a portrait of its patron, the Trapezuntine emperor Alexios III (r. 1349–1390).[26] Given the large size of the book (320 × 240 mm) and its large-format miniatures, the pictorial program would be legible to a group of readers, which, according to Nicolette Trahoulia, suggests its performative dimension.[27] Beyond its size, a number of formulaic compositional devices assist with legibility, and the exchange of letters is one such device. Of the 250 illuminations throughout the 193 folios of the Venice

24 For the text, see Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Historia Alexandri Magni*, ed. Kroll, trans. Stoneman. On the Venice copy of the Alexander Romance, see Xyngopoulos, *Les Miniatures du Roman d'Alexandre*, Evans, *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, pp. 62–63 (cat. no. 32), Drandaki/Papanikola-Bakirtzi/Tourta, *Heaven and Earth*, 197–98 (cat. no. 95), Evangelatou/Papastavrou/Skotti, *Byzantium*, 48–51 (cat. no. 8), Trahoulia, "The Venice Alexander Romance", ead., "The Alexander Romance" as well as the facsimile *The Greek Alexander Romance*.

25 See also Chapter 15, pp. 412–14 in this volume.

26 Trahoulia offers a succinct overview of the original patronage and subsequent history of the book in *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 31–35 and "The Alexander Romance".

27 Trahoulia, "The Venice Alexander Romance: Pictorial Narrative", p. 149.

Alexander Romance, over 40 miniatures depict letters explicitly. Nearly half of these scenes combine the dictation of a letter with its dispatch, and this combination becomes an easily legible visual *topos* throughout the manuscript that efficiently situates and reorients the narrative for its viewers.

As in the scenes of letter exchange in the Madrid Skylitzes, the Venice Alexander Romance similarly adopts continuous narration in which multiple representations of a messenger and a letter are paired with singular depictions of its sender and recipient. The miniatures on folio 89r and 89v, exemplify this point particularly well and can be taken as a template for letter exchange repeated throughout the book (Figs. 14.4 and 14.5).[28] This section of the story is structured by a series of letters concerning the Alexander's marriage to Darius's daughter. The context is made clear by the caption on the recto page stating that Alexander sends a letter to Darius's mother, wife, and daughter. In the miniature, Alexander, dressed in Byzantine imperial garb as he is throughout the manuscript, dictates to a diminutive secretary seated at his feet (Fig. 14.4). In the foreground, the scribe writes the letter, which is then shown rolled and presented by Alexander to two messengers at the center, who are repeated carrying the scroll away to the right.

The verso image duplicates this basic formula (Fig. 14.5).[29] The full-page miniature is divided into two registers, both depicting the reception and dispatch of letters but with different protagonists. In the upper register, Darius's kin reply to Alexander's letter – the very letter represented in transit in the previous miniature. In the uppermost left corner his letter is pictured first as a white scroll passed among four male figures then held open, displaying its script to the three women and to the page's viewers.[30] Darius's wife gestures with one hand to the scribe at her feet, to whom she dictates her response, and with her other hand she offers her response, now rolled as a scroll, to the messengers who carry it off to the left of the page. With a compression of action and an economy of gestures the image shows the women receiving Alexander's letter and dictating and dispatching their own.

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28 Xyngopoulos, *Les Miniatures du Roman d'Alexandre*, figs. 106–07 (with inscriptions at p. 39); *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 227–28.

29 Trahoulia, "The Venice Alexander Romance: Pictorial Narrative", pp. 151–52, describes this page and provides the captions.

30 Significantly, the text written here is Georgian. This fact situates the manuscript's artist(s) within the Georgian-speaking community of Trebizond. Trahoulia (in *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 37 and "The Venice Alexander Romance", p. 98) notes that the Georgian script was first identified by M. Garidis in a review of Xyngopoulos's publication of the miniatures.

FIGURE 14.4 Venice Alexander Romance. Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, Gr. 5, fol. 89r: Alexander sends a letter to the wife, mother, and daughter of Darius
PHOTO: ISTITUTO ELLENICO DI STUDI BIZANTINI E POSTBIZANTINI DI VENEZIA

FIGURE 14.5 Venice Alexander Romance. Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, Gr. 5, fol. 89v: the wife, mother, and daughter of Darius send a letter to Alexander; Alexander writes to his mother Olympias
PHOTO: ISTITUTO ELLENICO DI STUDI BIZANTINI E POSTBIZANTINI DI VENEZIA

The lower register of this miniature mirrors the formal arrangement and logic of the upper scene closely but is structured around Alexander, recipient of the letter composed above. He is pictured receiving their letter from a standing courtier, dictating his own letter (which, according to the caption, was addressed to his mother Olympias), and handing it to two turbaned messengers who carry it off stage left. Both scenes show a full circuit of epistolography: letters arrive, are seen, are dictated, change hands, and are dispatched.

Textually, the bulk of this section of the Romance is comprised of letters, which are all briefly introduced by a third-person narrator. This means that despite the presence of narration the text itself is mostly structured as an epistolary exchange. Thus, through letters Alexander announces in his own voice his intentions to marry Darius's daughter Roxanne, and the women's compliance is similarly conveyed in their own voice through letters. In illustrating the Romance, however, the artists followed the narrator and focused more on the movement of the letters rather than their content. The outcome of the epistolary exchange is only elaborated two miniatures later, on folio 91r, where Alexander's letter is read by Olympias in the upper register above a scene celebrating his marriage to Roxanne, negotiated via letters a few folia back. The translation of the epistolary textual genre into pictorial terms, therefore, focuses on cause and effect, with letter exchange featuring as the cause and the content of the letters as the effect.

The transmission of letters is the driving force for the imagery here and throughout the pages of the Venice Alexander Romance, where letters are repeatedly shown composed, rolled for delivery, arriving and departing, unrolled, being presented. In the miniatures just described these actions are compressed and multiplied. Formally the letter forms a vertical axis along the center of each composition. Ancillary figures involved in the production and dissemination of the letters are clustered on one side of this axis and the senders and receivers sit framed by architecture on the other. This division between interior and exterior setting underscores the point that that action of the letter, while instigated by the solitary seated rulers, is mobilized by multiple messengers in the wider world.

While epistolary exchange is compressed most densely on folio 89v – and it should be noted that this is the only page to combine two instances of letter delivery, recitation, composition, and dispatch into one miniature – these same processes are stretched out over a series of pages in other areas of the manuscript. The most elaborately attenuated epistolary exchange involves Alexander's engagement with the Amazons, which spans eight separate scenes running from folios 167r to 172r.[31]

31 Xyngopoulos, *Les Miniatures du Roman d'Alexandre*, figs. 208–15 (with inscriptions at pp. 58–59); *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 383–93.

This is another section of the Romance that is entirely epistolographic: the ruler of the Macedonians and the Amazons encounter each other only through their letters. When Alexander turned his attention to the Amazons, he announced via a letter his victories and his intentions to come to their land. The miniature on folio 167r adopts the by now familiar formula for representing the dictation and dispatching of letters: Alexander is represented seated with a scribe writing his words, and he hands the rolled scroll to a messenger, who appears a second time exiting stage right with the letter. The next page, folio 168r, depicts Alexander's messenger handing the scroll, which is unrolled for reading, to the queen of the Amazons, who on the verso of that page, dictates her response and hands it to a messenger for delivery. The miniatures on the subsequent pages repeat this compositional pattern: Alexander receives the queen's letter, dictates his response, and hands it to a messenger for delivery (fol. 169v). His letter is presented to the queen of the Amazons on the next page (fol. 171r), and the queen dictates and dispatches her response along with royal gifts (fol. 171v), which are received by Alexander (fol. 172r) (Figs. 14.6 and 14.7).

The pattern to emerge from this extended section is an alternation of scenes showing the dictating and dispatching of letters with scenes representing the receiving and reading of letters – first Alexander, then the queen of the Amazons, and then back and forth. Here, as throughout the manuscript, the protagonists appear enthroned and flanked by attendant figures; a secretary on a low stool at their feet writes on the parchment, often with the script visible to the viewer, and they simultaneously give the rolled scroll to a diminutive messenger who is represented again carrying the letter away towards the edge of the miniature. This is the basic formula for virtually all of the manuscript's "dictate and dispatch" scenes. The reception of letters is equally formulaic: as a messenger hands the rolled letter to the enthroned rulers, another attendant figure holds the letter open, displaying the script and signaling the reading of its content. This "reception and recitation" formula appears throughout the manuscript.

As with the Byzantine emperor in the Skylitzes manuscript, Alexander's interface with the vast world around him is the letter. His network of letters includes rulers and concerns military strategy, as is predominantly the case with the Madrid Skylitzes, but Alexander's letters also negotiate kinship circles. Earlier in the Romance, the majority of letters are exchanged between Alexander and Darius but also with Darius's female kin (fols. 70v, 89r, 89v) and Alexander's mother (fols. 89v, 91r, 134v, 135r, 186r, 193r). The later part of the of the book, following extended segments structured around the exchange of

FIGURE 14.6 Venice Alexander Romance. Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, Gr. 5, fol. 171v: Amazons send their letter to Alexander along with royal gifts
PHOTO: ISTITUTO ELLENICO DI STUDI BIZANTINI E POSTBIZANTINI DI VENEZIA

FIGURE 14.7 Venice Alexander Romance. Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, Gr. 5, fol. 172r: Alexander receives the Amazons' letters and gifts
PHOTO: ISTITUTO ELLENICO DI STUDI BIZANTINI E POSTBIZANTINI DI VENEZIA

letters between Alexander and Candake, queen of Meroe,[32] and the queen of the Amazons, is framed by an epistolary exchange with his mother. The final sequence concerning Alexander's demise is initiated by a letter from mother to son (fol. 86r–v), then on the penultimate miniature of the book Olympias learns of Alexander's poisoning through a letter from him (fol. 193r).[33]

Keeping in mind the large format of the Venice Alexander Romance and its performative possibilities raised by Nicolette Trahoulia, we should understand the profusion of letter exchange as one of the formal devices that govern the orientation and pace of the narrative. Through repetition, epistolary exchanges assume a formulaic currency that renders the narrative more easily legibility. Sections of the plot are punctuated by correspondence so that an easily recognizable – even predictable – flurry of letter activity signals to the viewers a reorientation of the narrative. Even as letter exchange is a *topos* for legibility, the artists of this manuscript seem to have taken delight in elaborating epistolary action more fully than is necessary for mere narrative comprehension. The bureaucratic life of the letter is visualized much more fully than in the Madrid Skylitzes. The Venice Alexander Romance pictures the letter as more than a sign of political engagement; it is also a bureaucratic endeavor, as is indicated by the sheer abundance of ancillary figures involved in letter exchange.

4 The Vatican *Epithalamion*: Letters and the Vernacular Poetic Narrative

As with the historiographic and romance works already discussed, a final case study consolidates our understanding of the letter as a metonym for political interaction and as a forceful compositional device for narrative comprehension. But unlike the previous examples, in which the images follow the text fairly faithfully (in that the text specifies an exchange of letters and the images represent that exchange), in this final manuscript the visual and textual rendering of letters complement each other in an innovative manner that relates to its intended original viewer. The book in question, Vatican Greek manuscript 1851, alternates visual and verbal epistolography so as to expose the letter's potential for structuring word, image, and ritual.

32 The exchange of letters between the two features on fols. 141r, 141v, 142r, 165v, 166r. In addition to letters, his exchange with Candake also includes the transfer of his likeness as an icon. Thus Alexander's words and visible semblance circulate in tandem.

33 Xyngopoulos, *Les Miniatures du Roman d'Alexandre*, fig. 249 (with inscriptions at p. 66); *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 435.

Like the Madrid Skylitzes and the Venice Alexander Romance, the Vatican codex is unique. It is the sole surviving example of an illuminated poem composed in vernacular Greek for the arrival of a bride.[34] Unlike the other two unique manuscripts discussed, however, the Vatican example is fragmentary: only eight pages survive and they are currently bound in the incorrect order. Moreover, unlike the previous examples, this book is relatively intimate, having been produced for a young foreign princess rather than a male ruler. Not only is the poem deictic, addressing its reader/viewer in second-person speech, but the relatively small scale of the book (227 × 170 mm) paired with a large formal script and its unique text-image relationship all suggest that the bride was the intended original viewer.

Regardless of its fragmentary state, the organization of the extant pages of the book is structured by letters between an unnamed western king and the emperor of the Romans that negotiate the marital union of their children. Of the principal surviving sections of the codex, the first two begin with letters from the father of the bride-to-be: first an epistolary lament and then a joyful proclamation.[35] These letters from the western king set into motion a series of narrative transformations and set the pace of the story.

The first extant page commences in the midst of a letter from the western king to the emperor of the Romans (fol. 8r–v). He bitterly laments the prospect of being separated from his daughter but concedes to send her to the great eastern ruler who will become her father-in-law. At the conclusion of this epistolary lament, the text switches to third-person narration, announcing that the western king immediately sent a "congratulator" to the emperor. The switch in narrative voice is paired with an image of Constantinople, the destination of the letter and, in turn, of the princess (fol. 2r). The subsequent

34 Because it concerns the arrival of a bride more than a celebration of marriage *per se*, as Michael Jeffreys, "The Vernacular εἰσιτήριοι", points out, it would be more accurately described as an *eisiterioi*-poem. The term *epithalamion* is used here for the sake of convenience since this is how it is most often described in the scholarship. Because the manuscript preserves no proper names, its date and context of production remain debatable. The scholarship is vast and much of it is cited in Hennessy, "The Vatican Epithalamion", although the different scholarly positions are not characterized accurately. Iacobini, "La memoria del presente", offers a thorough survey of the evidence for a Palaiologan date for the manuscript. It must be stressed that while I maintain a Komnenian date for the manuscript's production, the discussion that follows, which is adapted from Hilsdale, "Constructing a Byzantine *Augusta*", stands regardless of the date.

35 The first epistolary lament references an earlier correspondence, which may have constituted part of the missing preceding folia. See Hilsdale, "Constructing a Byzantine *Augusta*", p. 461 and n. 42.

two pages of the codex depict in detail the arrival of the letter from the king and the recitation of its contents (Figs. 14.8 and 14.9). On folio 2v, we follow the arrival of the letter in the form of a rolled white scroll. The congratulator dressed in a red cloak arrives by boat in the lowest register; he hands the western king's letter to a Byzantine courtier in the middle register; and in the upper register that courtier presents it to the emperor, who is enthroned and surrounded by his son and an impressive phalanx of attendants wearing richly patterned attire and dramatic headgear (Fig. 14.8). The miniature on the next page, on folio 7r, follows the further movement of the letter and pictures its words being returned to spoken voice. In the lower register of the page the emperor, carrying the scroll and followed by his son, begins to ascend a staircase, and in the upper register he stands between his son and the empress while a diminutive courtier reads aloud the western king's letter (Fig. 14.9). The scroll here is depicted unrolled in the hands of the courtier, displaying marks designating script to the viewer. The text on the verso of the folio then describes the universal sentiments of joy inspired by the letter's message, the betrothal itself. The announcement of the union – that is, the recitation of the letter – incited joy and excitement in everyone.

Over the course of these initial pages, the message of the betrothal – the letter – is conveyed in three forms: textually the words of the western king are spelled out in Greek vernacular (fol. 8r–v), then are visually denoted by a scroll changing hands from the western messenger through the ranks of the Byzantine court to the emperor himself (fol. 2v), and, finally, the scroll is unrolled and shown as script to be voiced by the courtier positioned before the imperial family announcing the betrothal (fol. 7r). Following this transformation, from textual to visual to an implicitly verbal performance, the poet pauses to describe the joyous result of the betrothal promised by this momentous epistolary exchange (fol. 7v).

The second extant narrative segment of the Vatican manuscript begins with a second letter. The poet announces the arrival of another message, a "golden proclamation", from the western ambassadors (fol. 1r). Below the narrator's words, a miniature depicts the emperor enthroned and surrounded by dignitaries receiving the letter from a western ambassador. Then the poet once again assumes the voice of the father of the bride-to-be in the form of a letter offering praise to all parties involved (the eastern emperor and his *porphyrogennetos* son as well as his own daughter) and announcing the imminent arrival of the princess, which unfolds visually on the subsequent pages of the codex (fols. 3v and 6r).

FIGURE 14.8 Vatican Epithalamion. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1851, fol. 2v: the arrival of the messenger
PHOTO: BIBLIOTECA APOSTOLICA VATICANA

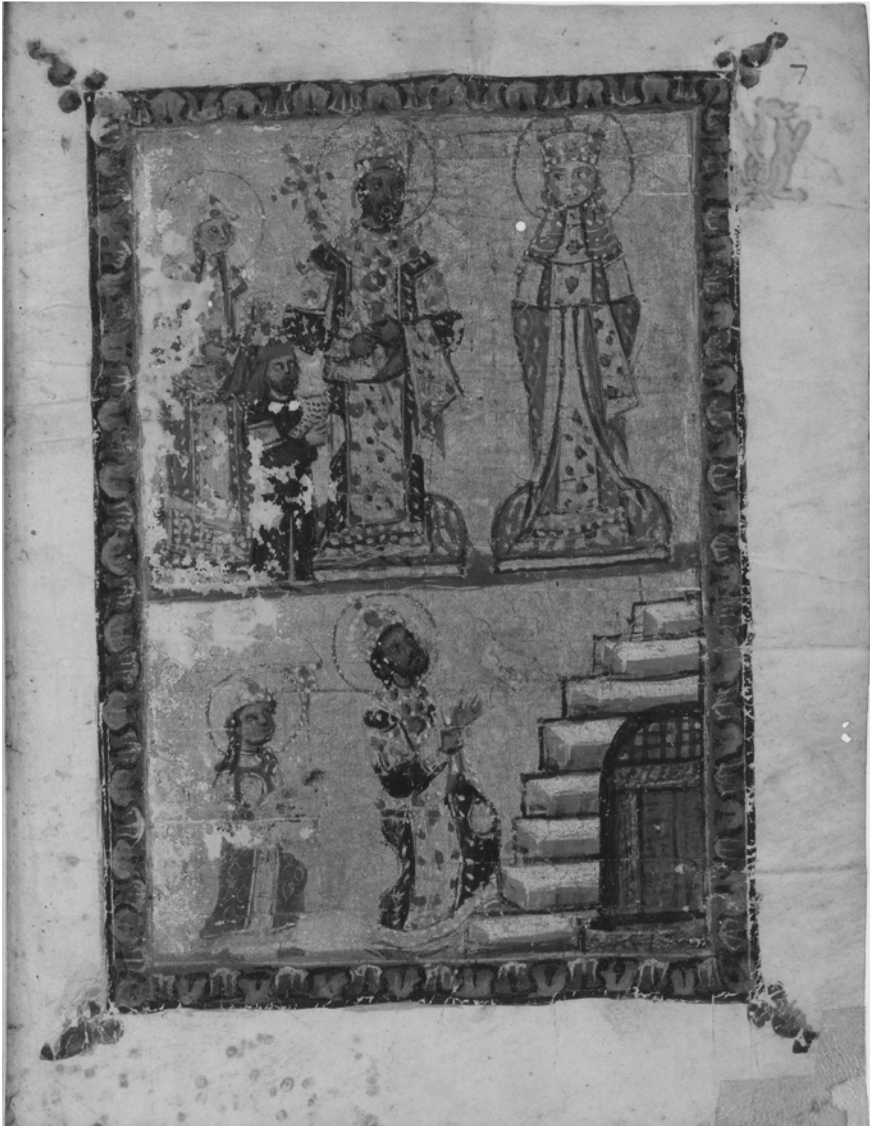

FIGURE 14.9 Vatican Epithalamion. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1851, fol. 7r: the announcement of the betrothal
PHOTO: BIBLIOTECA APOSTOLICA VATICANA

The miniature on folio 3v depicts the arrival of the western princess and her transformation into a Byzantine *augusta* (Fig. 14.10). She is portrayed three times, first in the upper left corner dressed in simple red attire – precisely the same red as the western messenger who previously delivered her father's letter – as she is welcomed by Byzantine women wearing ornate headdresses and purple robes hemmed with gold. After crossing a bridge to the upper right corner, the princess wears more luxurious golden robes, and then in the lower register she sits enthroned and surrounded by a sumptuously clad Byzantine entourage (Fig. 14.10). The viewer easily follows this progression, where her movement through the page and her accompanying sartorial transformation signal the incorporation of the foreign-born bride into the Byzantine court.

In the lower register of this page the princess is presented as worthy of veneration as the poet predicted, and this scene also commands a halt to the narrative in formal terms. This lower scene of static, even iconic, presentation thus formally parallels that of the imperial family on folio 7r, which constituted a moment of stillness and reflection following the rapidly unfolding movement of the western king's first letter. Recall that in the first section of the Vatican codex, the letter was shown being read aloud on folio 7v as a moment of absorption in and reflection upon the contents of the letter, which, the poet tells us, inspired joy in all. In the second narrative section of the book, the words of the father (his second letter) constitute a promise that is fulfilled visually on folio 3v where the princess returns the gaze of the viewer, causing a pause to the visual narrative and a moment of reflection upon the letter's promise, her very arrival.

While in the first sequence of the manuscript (fols 2v and 7r) the action proceeds from the lower register towards a stilled scene of presentation above, the scene on folio 3v progresses from left to right above towards a stilled tableau below. The artists employed the same narrative progression but inverted the order: in each, sequential movement conveyed through continuous narration arrests in proclamation (fol. 7r) and presentation (fol. 3v). But in the second instance it is not the scroll, the father's words recorded textually, that drives the narrative forward, but the very body of the betrothed herself, the subject of her father's letter. Whereas the document of the betrothal – the letter from the western king – was initially transformed from emotional words of separation (fol. 8r–v) to a joyous promise or "golden proclamation" (fol. 1v), here on folio 3v the subject of the betrothal letter, the bride-to-be herself, undergoes a similar transformation resulting in her own golden adornment and veneration.[36]

36 Hilsdale, "Constructing a Byzantine *Augusta*", p. 470.

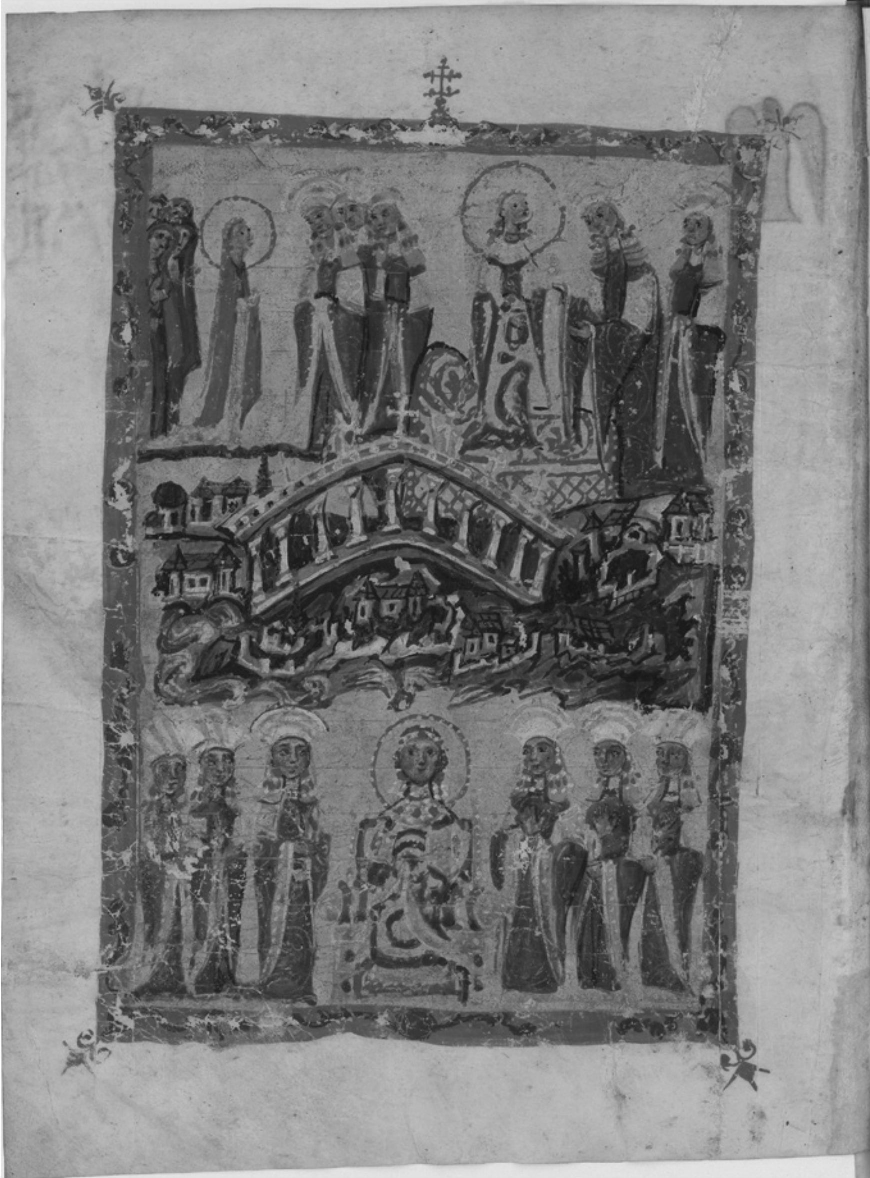

FIGURE 14.10 Vatican Epithalamion. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1851, fol. 3v: the arrival of the western princess
PHOTO: BIBLIOTECA APOSTOLICA VATICANA

Overall, information delivery propels the textual and visual narrative of the Vatican *epithalamion*. The initial words of the western king are presented textually as a letter to the emperor to be read by the viewer (fol. 8r–v); his words become the scroll, which is then shown delivered to the imperial court where, after changing hands, it is unrolled and read aloud to be appreciated (fols. 2v–7r). Then the second letter from the father of the bride-to-be, which is pictured initially as a scroll (fol. 1r) whose text then appears on the verso to be read by the viewer, inaugurates a second sequence of events culminating in the arrival of the princess herself and her transformation and presentation (fol. 3v). The extant codex is thus structured by a father's farewell in the form of a painful lament and by his joyous proclamation of the union, both voiced through letters. In this way the western king's letters serve to structure and advance the narrative. But, beyond this, the Vatican manuscript exhibits an innovative relationship between text and image that is designed to make the narrative legible to the original viewer of the book, the bride herself, who would have arrived in Constantinople without a full grasp of Greek. The miniatures unpack and augment the text, filling in details of station at the imperial capital.[37] The epistolary genre and the visual representation of letter exchange assume a further significance in light of this intended original viewer.

The Vatican epithalamion fully exploits the ritual and performative qualities of epistolography.[38] Letters are not merely bearers of information or metonyms for political engagement – although they are both of these – but they also proclaim events that are fulfilled pictorially. This is also the case with the Venice Alexander Romance – recall that Alexander and Darius's wife correspond about the possibility of his marriage to Roxanne, which is then represented a few folia later. But in the Vatican manuscript, the epistolary exchange sets up a series of events that culminate in the reflection on the contents and consequences of the letters. This added dimension distinguishes the pace and character of the epistolary process. In this way, the interplay between the poem and its pictorial program strikes a ritual tone, one akin to the *prokypsis* ceremony, where the imperial family assumes the position of a *tableau vivant*.[39] In the Vatican manuscript, again, the momentum of information delivery culminates

37 This point is further underscored by the final miniature of the codex, which is not discussed here and which must relate to the context of the book's production. See ibid.

38 On epistolary rituals see also Chapter 11 in this volume.

39 On the *prokypsis* ceremony, which is understood to have developed in the Komnenian period despite the fact that our sources are principally Palaiologan, see Heisenberg, *Aus der Geschichte und Literatur der Palaiologenzeit*, pp. 85–97, Jeffreys, "The Comnenian Prokypsis", Maguire, "The Disembodied Hand", and Parani, "Rise like the Sun", among others.

in the stilled ceremonial presentation of the western letter (fol. 7r) and the western princess (fol. 3v).

5 Conclusion

Careful attention to the visual representation of letters and letter exchange can tell us much about epistolography in Byzantium, an especially valuable endeavor in light of the absence of a robust corpus of extant original letters. But in addition to compensating for a gap in the material record, this essay has demonstrated how the representation of letters and letter exchange constitutes a powerful narrative strategy that could be finely calibrated for distinct purposes. Thus, while the visual material discussed here reveals how letters work in Byzantium, attention to the representation of letters also offers insights into how visual narratives work. The letter, in my account, serves as an easily recognizable *topos* that facilitates narrative cohesion and offers an opportunity for the dynamic interplay of word and image.

The three case studies discussed here are idiosyncratic in that the three volumes represent the only extant illustrated examples of their particular genre, each constituting the only surviving extensively illustrated copy of a Greek work of historiography, romance, and vernacular poetry respectively. Taken together, the three manuscripts expose the metonymic force of the letter in Byzantine pictorial representation. By metonymic force, I mean to suggest that the letter visually encodes a semantic association with its sender, whereby the letter literally stands in for the person of its sender in a relationship best expressed through the idea of a part (letter as extension of person) taken for a whole (that very person). In this way, the letter conveys the force of presence, making the absent protagonists present by proxy. In these diverse contexts, we see the letter mediating relationships by forging personal bonds and by proclaiming more public allegiances. The letter stands in for diplomatic engagement between the emperor of Byzantium and diverse rulers, bureaucrats, and kin. In the Madrid Skylitzes the imperial political networks are negotiated by the delivery of letters, which stand in as shorthand for a range of diplomatic engagements. Letter exchange performs a similar sort of diplomacy in the Venice Alexander Romance and the Vatican *epithalamion* as well. With the shift to more rhetorical and poetic genres, however, we see a transition in the visual depiction of epistolography as it works in tandem and in nuanced ways with the epistolary genre of writing.

Far more consistently than in the Madrid Skylitzes, letters are shown in the Venice Alexander Romance and the Vatican *epithalamion* to be bureaucratic,

public and communal at once: their dictation appears in the presence of multiple attendant figures and their reception entails the performance of their content. In these contexts, speech acts are imagined and put forward as letters to structure the pacing of the narrative. And these epistolary speeches are punctuated by images that elaborate the bureaucratic world of the letter: the pictorial programs of both manuscripts stress the intermediaries involved in the exchange of letters – scribes, messengers, courtiers, and heralds. The Venice Alexander Romance showcases this bureaucracy, turning the activities of letter exchange into *topoi* predictably repeated throughout the text in both compressed and attenuated form. The many intermediaries involved in the conveyance of letters are highlighted in the Vatican codex as well and even more so in that we see letters passing through bureaucratic strata of the imperial court, with its detailed and finely calibrated portrayal of dress as the primary visual marker of station. Whereas the Venice book pictures the messengers similarly dressed (with distinctions of color merely serving to distinguish between the figure that is repeated for continuous narration), the Vatican miniatures make a point of distinguishing among different groups of courtiers and dignitaries sartorially – and this attention to courtly attire is, indeed, one of the distinguishing features of the manuscript.

For the Venice copy of the Alexander Romance, the frequent scenes of epistolary activity may suggest the performative quality of the book. Again, easily recognizable motifs such as this and its large format lend a degree of legibility ideal for group viewing and indicate the book's somewhat communal role. In the Vatican *epithalamion*, letters also suggest something of the original viewing/reading context, but its smaller scale with large legible script and first- and second-person voice mark it as a far more intimate book with a didactic role. The representation of letters in this work augments the text so as to render the narrative legible even without full comprehension of Greek; letters here also structure the pace of the book, setting a ceremonial tone to the narrative in sync with the ritual life of the Byzantine court.

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CHAPTER 15

Letters in Narrative Literature

Carolina Cupane

Compared with the narrative mode, the epistolary mode possesses a special capacity for expression. By depicting events in the first person instead of the third person and employing the present tense instead of the narrative past tense, the epistolary mode dramatizes the account, so to speak, and thereby creates the appearance of authenticity and eyewitness experience. From their inception, narrative genres (in particular, fictional narratives) integrated letters into first-hand discourse for this very reason and appropriated this inherent dramatic impact.

1 The Tradition of Classical Antiquity

As in the case of direct speech employed in dialogues and orations, the epistolary mode characterizes the narrative style of ancient historiographers, most of all Thucydides.[1] These authors use this mode in the form of everyday official documents, which are intended to lend credibility to the narrative; it is also employed for dramatic effect, rhetorical embellishment of the plot, and characterization of certain *dramatis personae*.

As an intrinsically open, uncanonized literary form that existed for centuries on the margins of high literature, the ancient novel was particularly prone to contamination and influence from other (including non-narrative) genres. With regard to the development of the novel, several genres primarily influenced its style: epic, as the novel has been considered its bourgeois incarnation;[2] drama, which provided both the rough plot and the dialogue structure; and finally the genres of biography and historiography, to which the novel owes its spatial and temporal framework, and most importantly its prose style. However, the novel resounds with the voices of many smaller genres too, such as pseudoscientific paradoxography, and not least, epistolography.

1 See, for example, the letter of Nicias to the Athenians in Thucydides 7.10–18, as well as Scardino, *Gestalt und Funktion der Reden*, pp. 607–12 and Chapter 1, p. 35 in this volume.

2 Lukács, *Theorie* des *Romans*, pp. 110–32.

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The interplay of all these "foreign" voices makes the novel a truly polyphonic entity.[3] As in historiography, the epistolary mode is also used here for the purpose of dramatization in addition to the creation of narrative suspense, given that a letter can fall into the wrong hands and as a result set the wheels of the plot in motion. Thus, letters can often signal a shift in the plotline, connect various storylines with each other, and/or sum up what has already been said.[4] However, letters can also be part of an apparatus of authentication. For instance, the many official letters sent to and from rulers, governors, and generals[5] fall within this category. These letters follow the historiographical model and serve to create the desired effect of make-believe.[6] But most of the time, the letters inserted into late antique novels are of a private nature. To a much greater extent than in historiographical works, such letters constitute privileged areas of subjectivity – short *ethopoiiai* embedded within the flow of the narrative, through which the personality and distinctive character of individuals as well as their innermost feelings come into sharper focus.[7]

At a fundamental level, the formal stylistic standards of the ancient tradition were never challenged by the Byzantine literati, not even when the subject matter itself was perceived as morally reprehensible and was thus condemned. They instead separated the subject matter from its literary form and set the two on different planes: the indecent material, because of its pagan content, they could – indeed, had to – reject, whereas the language and style they retained and thenceforth considered compulsory. Variations and innovations are nevertheless not entirely absent, but they came slowly and haltingly into use. Both an affinity for tradition and innovative features are apparent in the use of epistolary discourse in the two most significant narrative forms, historiography and romance. This discussion focuses upon fictional literature, but first it is essential to examine briefly historiographical works in this regard.

3 For the novel's intrinsic polyphony, see Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 288–327; Fusillo, *Il romanzo greco*, pp. 17–109.

4 On the form and function of letters in the ancient novel, see Letoublon, "La lettre dans le roman grec", pp. 271–88; see also Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 133–68.

5 E.g., Heliodorus v 9, 1–10, 1 (Letter from the Persian general Mitranes to the satrap Oroondates); ibid. x 1, 3–2, 2 (Letter from the Ethiopian king Hydaspes to the council of elders); ibid. x 34, 1–4 (Letter from the satrap Oroondates to King Hydaspes); Chariton iv 6, 8 (Letter from the Persian king Artaxerxes to his military officers Mitranes and Pharnakes).

6 On this point, see Morgan, "Make-believe and Make Believe", pp. 175–229.

7 Fusillo, *Il romanzo greco*, pp. 94–95 and, more recently, Robiano, "La voix et la main".

2 Letters in Byzantine Historiography

The early Byzantine historiographers (who adhered closely to the style of their classical predecessors) are characterized by their heavy use of rhetorically sophisticated speeches and letters which are formally difficult to differentiate from each other. This stylistic homogeneity is grounded in the fact that both types of composition were intended to be read aloud and were thus subject to the rhetorical principles of the oral speech (προφορικὸς λόγος), for just as the audience of a speech, the recipient of a letter was also always a listener. In the case of letters inserted into historical writing, which all belong to the category of diplomatic and/or official communication, the oral performance was also always an official affair, which made letters de facto public speech.[8] Thus, it is only logical that (save for a few exceptions) the letters, conveyed in direct speech, fit seamlessly into the narrative and dispense with formal opening and closing formulas, such as naming the addressee, salutatory clichés, and a concluding valediction. The exchange of letters between opposing generals in Prokopios may be taken as a typical example. Belisarius' correspondence with the Persian general Mirranes before the battle of Dara in 530,[9] the letters from Belisarius to the leaders of the Goths regarding the restitution of Lilybaion in 533,[10] or those between the Herulian commander Pharas and the Vandal king Gelimer from the same year[11] are splendid pieces of rhetoric that enliven the dry narrative and combine skillful rhetorical splendor with practicality.[12]

The historian Agathias, a generation younger than Prokopios, is in no way inferior to him with regard to stylistic refinement and rhetorical elegance. Two letters of Justinian (allegedly reproduced verbatim) are small masterpieces of political rhetoric that were probably never written in this form. The first letter concerns the case of Goubazes,[13] the defamed and assassinated king of the Lazi; the second was addressed in 559 to the Utigur Hun general Sandlich, in order to provoke him to wage war against the Kutrigurs.[14] In the second letter, the author draws special attention to expressions customized for the personality

8 This has already been noted by Sykutres, "Epistolographie", pp. 200–02; see the in-depth analysis of letters and speeches in early Byzantine historiography in Taragna, *Logoi historias*.

9 Prokopios, *Wars* I 14, 1–12, eds. Haury/Wirth, vol. 1, p. 65, l. 20–p. 67, l. 17.

10 Ibid. IV 5, 12–24, eds. Haury/Wirth, vol. 1, p. 441, l. 2–p. 442, l. 29.

11 Ibid. IV 6, 15–30, eds. Haury/Wirth, vol. 1, p. 445, l. 11–p. 447, l. 13.

12 See Cameron, *Procopius*, pp. 148–49.

13 Agathias, *History* IV 2, 3–6, ed. Keydell, p. 124, l. 21–p. 125, l. 15.

14 Ibid. V 24, 3–7, ed. Keydell, p. 195, l. 19–p. 196, l. 15.

and character of the recipient: "How could a barbarian soul, arrogant and constantly thirsting for lucre, not have been easily confused by such words?"[15]

The letters contained in the history of Theophylaktos Simokattes constitute the pinnacle of rhetorical virtuosity; one example may be found in the correspondence between the Persian king Chosroes II and his defeated rival, Bahram,[16] both of whom – according to the author – are quoted verbatim (ἐπὶ λέξεως σύμφρασιν). This is undoubtedly true for the pompous forms of address, which Theophylaktos reproduces in full. The content, however, may be the author's own linguistic and stylistic achievement, using a source document as the foundation. The same is true of the letter from Chosroes to Emperor Maurice, even though Theophylaktos states explicitly that he has reproduced word-for-word "the message without any linguistic adornment" (πρέσβευσιν ἀκαλλώπιστον φράσεως), "so that through the unrefined language one may be able to view the meaning of the petition undistorted, as in a mirror".[17]

Like the lofty literary register, letters and speeches are integral components of traditional historiography from the early Byzantine period; it is therefore no surprise that these elements are completely absent from the chronicles of the middle Byzantine period, which were written for a broader audience and were less ambitious in their literary pursuits. They are not found again until the *History* of Leo the Deacon, which portrays the heroic battles of Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes against the Arabs and Bulgars in tones reminiscent of epic poetry. Following the tradition of ancient historiography, Leon adds an impressive number of speeches and letters to his account. These include the letter in which the eunuch and *parakoimomenos* Joseph Bringas attempts to incite the then *strategos* of the East and future emperor John Tzimiskes to betray his uncle Nikephoros Phokas;[18] the correspondence between Tzimiskes and Bardas Phokas during his rebellion in 970; or that between Tzimiskes and Bardas Skleros, who had been dispatched to quell the revolt.[19] All these documents, allegedly quoted verbatim, sparkle with rhetorical polish, numerous

15 Ibid. V 25, 1, ed. Keydell, p. 196, l. 19–20: πῶς δὲ οὐκ ἔμελλεν ῥαδίως τοῖσδε τοῖς ῥήμασι διαταραχθῆναι ψυχὴ βάρβαρος καὶ αὐθάδης καὶ ἀεὶ κερδῶν γλιχομένη.

16 Theophylaktos Simokattes, *History* IV 7, 7–9; 8, 5–8, eds. De Boor/Wirth, p. 163, l. 5–26; p. 164, l. 17–p. 165, l. 13.

17 Ibid. IV 10, 11, eds. De Boor/Wirth, p. 169, l. 13–15: τῇ ἀμαθίᾳ τῆς λέξεως τὸν νοῦν τῆς ἀξιώσεως ἀνεπίπλαστον ἐνοπτριζόμεθα; the text of the letter: ibid. IV 11, 1–11, eds. De Boor/Wirth p. 169, l. 16–p. 171, l. 10. For the possibility that the source documents could have been available to Theophylaktos, see Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice*, pp. 94–106.

18 Leo the Deacon, *History* III 2, ed. Hase, p. 38, l. 3–13; trans. Talbot/Sullivan, p. 89.

19 Ibid. VII 2–3 and VII 4 (respectively), ed. Hase, p. 115, l. 1–p. 116, l. 16; p. 118, l. 4–p. 119, l. 20, trans. Talbot/Sullivan, pp. 164–65, 167.

figures of speech and allusions to classical authors; for this reason it is extremely unlikely that they represent the original wording.[20]

The self-involved Michael Psellos, primarily interested in political intrigues and court affairs, rarely uses the dramatizing device of direct speech. Despite the careful rhetorical composition of his chronicle, which is deeply tinged with autobiography,[21] it does not feature any inserted letters or speeches. On the one hand, his perpetually central presence and participation in the depicted events made any additional attestation unnecessary in Psellos's eyes; on the other hand, the rather narrow focus of the narrative precluded the use of diplomatic correspondence.

Like Psellos, his contemporary, Michael Attaleiates also abstains from enhancing the narrative through the use of direct speech in the form of dialogues, speeches or letters, but for completely different reasons. Both the refreshing austerity of his reporting and his clear, straightforward language fulfill the aim set forth in the proem, the intention to write "with a concise and simple style, as befits a historian".[22]

In the historiography of the twelfth century, which is known to have been dependent upon the imitation of classical models to a special degree, quite a few official letters and documents – or rather, excerpts from them – are quoted directly. A particularly large number of these excerpts appear in the history of John Kinnamos, who was able to use official documents because of his position as imperial secretary. In the interest of literary cogency and clarity, the guiding qualities of Kinnamos's writing, these official documents are quoted in an abridged form with few rhetorical revisions and certainly do not represent the actual wording.[23] For example, he quotes extensively from the correspondence of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos to foreign rulers, such as the Seljuk Sultan Kilij Arslan II; the Norman King William I; King Conrad III of Germany; Stephen, King of Hungary; and Amalric I of Jerusalem.[24]

The same is true of Anna Komnene, who likewise sprinkles numerous letters and documents throughout her *Alexiad* (whose title alone is reminiscent

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20 On this point, see Hoffmann, "Geschichtsschreibung oder Rhetorik?".

21 Regarding the autobiographical coloring of Psellos's history, see Pietsch, *Die Chronographia*, esp. pp. 13–65.

22 Michael Attaleiates, *History*, ed. Tsolakis, p. 6, l. 24–25: βραχεῖ τινι ῥήματι καὶ ἁπλοϊκῷ, καθὰ προσήκει τοῖς ἱστορίας συγγράφουσιν.

23 Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 411–13.

24 John Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus* II 5, ed. Meineke, p. 39, l. 19–p. 41, l. 13 (Sultan); II 18, ibid., p. 85, l. 15–p. 86, l. 9 (Conrad III); IV 15, ibid., p. 173, l. 13–p. 175, l. 15 (William I); V 6, ibid., p. 217, l. 19–p. 218, l. 5 (Stephen of Hungary); V 13, ibid., p. 237, l. 18–p. 238, l. 1 (Amalric I).

of epic). As the emperor's daughter, she would have had easy access to these materials. In contrast to Kinnamos, Anna adheres more closely to the original language of the quoted documents, since letters in her work often appear with formal openings and closings. A prime example of this loyalty to the original text is perhaps the letter from Alexios I to Emperor Henry IV (delivered by Constantine Choirosphaktes in 1081) with its elaborate *intitulatio* ("Most noble and truly Christian brother, it is our Majesty's prayer that thy powerful sovereignty should thrive and ever increase in power") and an even more pompous closing ("May God grant to thee a long life, may he widen the borders of thy power and make all those who oppose thee into an object of derision and a footstool for thy feet").[25] The letter to the Seljuk Sultan, composed in a much simpler and less formal style ("You know, most glorious Sultan Clitziasthlan … out of care for you, I advise you …"), shows clearly what kind of hierarchical precepts prevailed in the imperial chancery.[26]

Striking, however, is the absence of inserted letters in the history of Niketas Choniates. Official documents are indeed mentioned frequently; however, these texts never pertain to diplomatic correspondence, but rather to administrative correspondence – usually imperial orders that were issued to various officials – and they are never quoted directly. The one letter quoted verbatim, the imperial letter (ἐπιστολή) attributed to Andronikos I, only exists in the later paraphrase of the work[27] and does not appear in the transmission of Niketas's actual text. Addressed to four corrupt officials, the letter plays with the names of the addressees and is characterized by a vernacular style. Aside from this instance, Choniates avoids quoting the exact contents of documents mentioned in his work. For the most part, he says nothing at all about them, for example, in the case of the written command (γραμμάτιον, δελτάριον, χάρτης) from Manuel I to the governors of Syria which ordered the capture and blinding of Andronikos Komnenos, but was ultimately intercepted by Andronikos's lover, Theodora. Niketas skillfully exploits all the narrative possibilities of this situation, which fits many typical novelistic clichés, but he omits the text of the

25 Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* III 10, 3–8, eds. Reinsch/Kambylis, p. 112, l. 66–p. 114, l. 34: p. 112, l. 66–68 (*intitulatio*): τὰ κατὰ τὴν σὴν μεγαλοδύναμον ἐξουσίαν καλῶς ἔχειν καὶ προκόπτειν ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον εὐχῆς ἐστὶν ἔργον τῇ βασιλείᾳ μου, πανευγενέστατε καὶ τῷ ὄντι χριστιανικώτατε ἀδελφέ; p. 114, l. 28–30 (closing): μακρύναι ὁ Θεὸς τὴν ζωήν σου, πλατύναι τὰ τῆς ἐξουσίας σου ὅρια καὶ θείη σοι πάντας τοὺς ἀντιπίπτοντας εἰς ὀνειδισμὸν καὶ εἰς καταπάτημα.

26 Ibid. IX 2, 3, eds. Reinsch/Kambylis, p. 264, l. 7–19: οἶδας, μεγαλοδοξότατε σουλτὰν Κλιτζιασθλάν … κηδόμενος δὲ σοῦ, παρεγγυῶμαι …

27 The text of the letter is published in the apparatus of van Dieten's edition (Niketas Choniates, *History*, ed. van Dieten, p. 331, 91 App.); its authenticity is disputed. Regarding the paraphrase, as yet unedited, see Davis, "The History Metaphrased"; cf. van Dieten, "Bemerkungen".

important document, probably because he did not know it.[28] In other cases he limits himself to rendering the content of a letter in an indirect form, for example, in the case of the short letter addressed from Andronikos I to the synod (βιβλίον λακωνίζον, γραμμάτιον βραχυσύλλαβον), which was written in order to obtain permission for an uncanonical marriage between his daughter Eirene and Alexios Komnenos, the illegitimate son of the late emperor Manuel.[29] As an author of brilliant, highly rhetorical speeches, Niketas prefers this form of dramatization, which was rooted in the ancient historiographical tradition. Indeed, Niketas favors speeches to such an extent that even the content of an imperial decree containing strict penalties for looting stranded ships (which apparently seemed quite important to him) is presented in the form of a speech.[30]

George Pachymeres in the thirteenth century shows little interest in quoting diplomatic and official correspondence, instead preferring, as Niketas Choniates before him, to mark important points of his account with speeches. The only exceptions are the lengthy letters written between 1293–97 by the patriarch Athanasios, which are quoted verbatim; in these letters Athanasios renounced the patriarchal throne and at the same time justified his previous conduct.[31] The inclusion of these quotations can be explained by Pachymeres's special attention to church affairs. The fact that the originals were stylistically revised by the author and at times considerably shortened is evidenced by the existence of two versions of a letter sent by the church archons to the patriarch Athanasios in his second term; the two versions of this letter are written in sharply different styles.[32]

John Kantakouzenos incorporates many speeches and faithfully quoted letters into his memoirs. The former are undoubtedly his own creations, which are used as a means of self-expression and explanation; the latter reproduce with precision original documents that were officially issued and serve as an important instrument of substantiation for the author's historical objectivity.

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28 Niketas Choniates, *History*, ed. van Dieten, p. 141, l. 13.

29 Ibid., p. 260, l. 53–60. The author speaks explicitly about the intent of the letter: νοῦς τῶν γραφομένων (l. 56).

30 Ibid., p. 327, l. 70–p. 328, l. 25. Concerning the stylistic composition and function of speeches in Niketas's work, see Efthymiadis, "Niketas Choniates: the Writer", pp. 40–43.

31 George Pachymeres, *Historical reports* VIII 23–24, ed. Failler, vol. 3, p. 193, l. 18–p. 195, l. 4 and p. 195, l. 18–29, as well as p. 281, l. 13–p. 283, 29; the documents inserted in the history should be compared with the version of events that Athanasios gives in his surviving letters: *Letters*, nos. 111 and 2, ed. and trans. Talbot, pp. 280–85 and 6–11; see Failler, "La première démission".

32 George Pachymeres, *Historical Reports* XIII 37, ed. Failler, vol. 4, p. 707, l. 16–p. 708, l. 13 and ibid., p. 717, l. 11–p. 725, l. 5.

Neither the speeches nor the letters have merely rhetorical or literary purposes.[33] A paradigmatic example of a letter quoted verbatim is the letter (tinged with vernacular) from the Sultan of Egypt and Syria, an-Nasir Hasan, to the emperor with its baroque *intitulatio*: Kantakuzenos is, among other names, addressed as "sword of the Macedonians; Sampson; King of the Greeks, Bulgarians, Vlachs, Russians and Alani; … ruler of the seas, the great rivers, and the islands, Angelos Komnenos Palaiologos Kantakouzenos".[34] At the same time, Kantakouzenos had mastered the rules and standards of the epistolary genre and employed them whenever it seemed to him advantageous. This is shown in the fictitious correspondence between Neilos (Kabasilas) and a certain Christodoulos (behind whom Kantakouzenos conceals himself), which serves as a proem and gives the author an opportunity to proclaim his historiographical credo in a topical manner.[35]

The famous scholar and contemporary of Kantakouzenos, Nikephoros Gregoras, allowed letters to influence his history to a much lesser extent, even though – or perhaps precisely because – he himself left behind an impressive collection of correspondence.[36] The few examples present in the text are rhetorical masterpieces, letters he had written to friends and did not want to withhold from the significantly broader readership of his *magnum opus*. Thus Gregoras quotes extensively verbatim (aside from a few necessary modifications at the end) from a letter addressed to Andronikos Zarides in 1326, in which he reports on the recently completed mission trip to the kral of Serbia Uroš III (1325/26) and sketches a vibrant, quasi-impressionistic description of the landscape.[37] Here the self-citation is implicit; it is, however, explicitly identified as such elsewhere. In a letter from 1329 to George Pepagomenos, Gregoras had recounted the refutation of a prophecy – a refutation which he had written, but the complete text of which he had not published at that time for reasons of expediency. The account contained in the letter was later inserted into the history and prefaced in this way:

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33 See Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 472–73.

34 John Kantakouzenos, *History* IV 14, ed. Schopen, vol. 3, p. 94, l. 1–p. 99, l. 9; quotation p. 94, l. 10–17: τῆς σπάθης τῶν Μακεδόνων, τοῦ Σαμψὼν, τοῦ βασιλέως τῶν Ἑλλήνων, τοῦ βασιλέως τῶν Βουλγάρων, τῶν Βλάχων, τῶν Ῥώσων καὶ τῶν Ἀλανῶν … τοῦ αὐθέντου τῶν θαλασσῶν καὶ τῶν ποταμῶν τῶν μεγάλων καὶ τῶν νήσων, Ἀγγέλου Κομνηνοῦ Παλαιολόγου τοῦ Καντακουζηνοῦ.

35 Ibid., Prologue, ed. Schopen, vol. 1, pp. 7–12.

36 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, ed. Leone.

37 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Roman History* VIII 14, ed. Schopen, vol. 1, p. 376, l. 9–p. 383, l. 22 = *Letters*, no. 32b, ed. Leone, vol. 2, p. 118, l. 58–p. 123, l. 216. The passage in unmodified form appears as well in a contemporaneous letter addressed to Athanasios (*Letters*, no. 32a, ed. Leone, vol. 2, pp. 107–15).

> A part of the writing [sc. of the refutation] I have left out for the time being … but what I have said in the form of a letter to a friend I will now weave into my history for those who wish to read it, so that my tactful silence is not interpreted by relentless critics as perplexity.[38]

When in exceptional cases Gregoras quotes the exact wording of a letter written by someone else (for instance, a letter by John Kantakouzenos), he feels compelled to shorten it and to edit it stylistically according to the rules of the genre, a fact which he candidly admits:

> Most of the bulk I will omit, because it is burdensome, and likewise here and there the ineloquent expressions I will retouch and polish up out of respect for my future readers; but in other places I will leave the ineloquence untouched, if it expresses the true meaning of the words more clearly.[39]

In conclusion, Byzantine historians uphold the classical tradition of interspersing letters and speeches within the narrative of historical events. Both of these additions functioned as rhetorical embellishment of the material and as a means of dramatizing the narrative, but they also acted as a guarantee of their veracity. While the early Byzantine historians utilized the rhetorical and literary potential of inserted letters to the fullest extent, later authors primarily made use of their capacity to authenticate the narrative. Because of the constraints of the genre, the letters inserted into historical works are predominantly official pieces of communication, documents of the extensive diplomatic network navigated by the Byzantine emperors. However, they are rarely quoted in their original words and in their complete form. Most of the time, the address and/or *intitulatio* as well as the closing formula are omitted in order to more smoothly integrate the letters into the objective narrative, and stylistic refinements were consistently made. Purely literary letters, such as

38 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Roman History* IX 11, ed. Schopen, vol. 1, p. 448, l. 22–p. 454, l. 6; quotation: p. 448, l. 19–p. 449, l. 2: καὶ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα τῶν γραφομένων ἀπόῤῥητα κεῖσθαι παρήκαμεν τέως … ἃ δ᾽ ὡς ἐν ἐπιστολῆς σχήματι πρὸς ἕνα τῶν φίλων εἰρήκειμεν, ἵνα μὴ τὸ τῆς εὐσχήμονος ἡμῶν σιωπῆς ὑπόληψιν ἀπορίας ὑπόθοιτο τοῖς ἀφειδεστέροις τῶν ὑβριστῶν, ταῦτα καὶ νῦν τοῖς ἐντυγχάνειν ἐθέλουσιν ἱστορίας ἕνεκα παραθήσομεν.

39 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Roman History* XV 3, ed. Schopen, vol. 2, p. 755, l. 2–6: τοῦ τε μήκους ὑφαιρούμενοι τὰ πλεῖστα, τοῦ ἐπαχθοῦς εἵνεκα, καὶ ἅμα τὸ ἀκαλλὲς τῶν λέξεων πὴ μὲν μικρὸν ὑπερείδοντές τε καὶ ἀνεγείροντες, τοῦ εὐπρεποῦς εἵνεκα τῶν ἀκούσειν μελλόντων, πὴ δ᾽ ἐῶντες, διὰ τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας ἐναργεστέραν τῶν λεγομένων δήλωσιν.

quotations from private correspondence in the work of Nikephoros Gregoras, appear only in isolated cases.

3 Letters in Byzantine Romance

3.1 *The Alexander Romance*

Whereas historical writing dominated the literary scene of Byzantium from the beginning, novelistic narrative in the classical tradition is a late phenomenon in Byzantine literature, first rediscovered in the course of the twelfth century. This observation can, however, be put in proper perspective if the so-called *Alexander romance*, or better, the *Alexander romances*, are considered. The presence of these evergreens in the history of Greek literature can be traced without interruption from the third century until well into the eighteenth century. Historiographical and fictional narratives meet within the *Alexander romances* in such a way that they may be regarded as a link between these two modes of narration and rightly so.[40]

Letters are a characteristic element in the oldest version of the work, the *Historia Alexandri Magni*, falsely attributed to Callisthenes. Alexander's triumphal march to the end of the world in this version is punctuated by rich diplomatic correspondence, fashioned according to the rules of the genre; the complete forms of address for the sender and the receiver, as well as the closing formula are always given.[41] For example, in a letter addressed to the inhabitants of Tyre, Alexander refers to himself as "Emperor of the Macedonians, son of Ammon, child of Emperor Philip, himself the most exalted emperor of Europe, Asia, and Lybia (= Africa)"[42] and the Persian king styles himself even more pompously as "Emperor of emperors, kinsman of the gods and one enthroned with the god Mithras, who shines with the sun and is himself a god, Darius."[43] Letters in the *Historia* are not merely rhetorical props, but an integral feature of the plot: they preface every battle initiative. All the conflicts

40 A good overview of ancient and medieval versions of the Alexander legend may be found in Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*; concerning the Byzantine Alexander romances in particular, see Jouanno, *Naissance et metamorphoses*; ead., *Mutations grecques tardives*; Moennig, *A Hero without Borders: 1. Alexander the Great*.

41 On such official letters see Withmarsh, "Addressing Power"; see also Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 169–92.

42 Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Historia Alexandri Magni* I 35, ed. Kroll, p. 39, l. 19–21: Βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος Μακεδόνων, υἱὸς ῎ΑμμοΧνος καὶ Φιλίππου βασιλέως παῖς καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ βασιλεὺς μέγιστος Εὐρώπης, Ἀσίας καὶ Λιβύης.

43 Ibid. I 36, 2, ed. Kroll, p. 40, l. 20–22: Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ θεῶν συγγενὴς σύνθρονός τε θεῷ Μίθρᾳ καὶ συνανατέλλων ἡλίῳ, ἐγὼ αὐτὸς θεὸς Δάρειος.

the hero has to fight on his way to the East are literally first staged in letters. In this respect, one could point to a number of examples: the correspondence of Alexander with the Persian king Darius;[44] with Poros, the king of India;[45] with Queen Candace,[46] and with the Amazons. In the last instance, the written exchange even replaces the action.[47]

In addition to this official and diplomatic correspondence, which clearly follows the historiographical model, two private letters, addressed respectively to Aristotle and Olympias, appear in the *Historia*; in these letters the victorious hero recalls once more the adventures he has experienced thus far.[48] In both character and function they are firmly rooted in the tradition of the contemporary romance novel. By bringing together the threads of the narrative in a more concise form, they serve an important role in navigating the reader and thus accommodating the needs of a broader readership or audience.[49]

The Byzantine versions of the *Historia*, which construct a Christianized image of Alexander throughout the narrative,[50] shift the focus to Alexander's conversion to Judaism in Jerusalem and the description of the wonders of the uninhabited world (ἀοίκιστος). As a result, the correspondence with Darius shrinks in accordance with the devaluation of the Persian chapter in the life of the hero. In the *Vita Alexandri* (*recension ε*), which probably originated in the eighth century, Alexander frequently forgoes writing and more often responds orally to the threatening letters of his adversary via envoys,[51] upon whom he himself relies for the purpose of oral communication. Accordingly, the number of official forms of address decreases, but they do not disappear completely. Rigid formality is still maintained, for example, in the letter from the inhabitants of Thessaloniki to Alexander, which opens with an address to the "ruler of the oikoumene, the most divine, who dwells among the eternal gods, Alexander", and closes with the usual farewell wish, "May you receive my heartfelt request insofar as it finds favor in your eyes. Be healthy, lord,

44 Ibid. I 36. 38. 40; II 10, 6–10. 17, 2–4, ed. Kroll, p. 40, l. 20–p. 41, l. 11; p. 44, l. 15–p. 45, l. 20; p. 78, l. 3–11; p. 79, l. 3–9; p. 87, 5–20.

45 Ibid. III 2, 2–5 and 8–11, ed. Kroll, p. 100, l. 10–23 and p. 101, l. 8–19.

46 Ibid. III 18, ed. Kroll, p. 115, l. 10–p. 116, l. 18.

47 Ibid. III 25–26, ed. Kroll, p. 124, l. 9–p. 126, l. 25.

48 Ibid. III 17, ed. Kroll, p. 106, l. 12–p. 115, l. 2 (to Aristotle); III 27–29, p. 128, l. 12–p. 131, l. 5 (to Olympias).

49 See Hägg, *Narrative Technique*, pp. 143 and 255.

50 However, one exception is the rhymed version originating in the late fourteenth century (*Alexander Poem*, ed. Aerts), which faithfully reproduces the secular-pagan atmosphere of the original.

51 See, e.g., *Vita Alexandri* (*recension ε*), 10, 4 and 6, ed. Trumpf, p. 36, l. 14–p. 37, l. 4 and p. 38, l. 2–12.

and communicate your will to us, your servants."[52] On the other hand, the *recension ε* includes three of Alexander's private letters to his mother that are unknown to the previous Alexander tradition. These letters do not have any narrative function and were probably intended to raise the thorny issue of the mother-son relationship.[53]

The late vernacular version (fifteenth century), the *Diegesis Alexandrou*, adheres closely to the content of *recension ε*, but shows a marked preference for the extensive quotation of letters and for the use of official forms of address even more colorful and pompous than those in the prototype. Thus this version revokes the oral diplomatic communication between Alexander and Darius and reverts back to the written correspondence of the original text.[54] The redactor even invents a letter from Olympias to Alexander, in whose opening formula personal and ceremonial forms of address are mingled: "My sweetest and beloved, my brilliant sunshine, the apple of my eye, Alexander, ruler and emperor of the whole world, I, your beloved mother Olympias, write to you, your majesty."[55]

3.2 *The Learned Romance of the Komnenian Period*

While the *Alexander romance* in its various forms continued on its path through the sub-literature of Byzantium without interruption, the romance conceptualized by the ancients was revived in the vicinity of the Komnenian court by the middle of the twelfth century, cast in dodecasyllable verse, and subtly but unmistakably inserted into a new cultural reality.[56] New and traditional elements are mingled in these works, a fact which can be observed readily in the use of epistolary discourse.

It is highly probable that Theodore Prodromos, the well-known scholar and prolific writer, was the first author who ventured to use this genre, which had for centuries lain dormant. In his *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* one does not find

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52 Ibid. 11, 4, ed. Trumpf, p. 40, l. 5 and 17, and p. 41, l. 1–3: Τῷ δεσπότῃ τῆς οἰκουμένης Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τῷ θειοτάτῳ καὶ ἐν θεοῖς … Δέχοιο τήνδε μου τὴν ἱκετήριον δέησιν, καθ᾽ ἅ … ἐστιν ἀρεστὸν ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς σου. Ἔρρωσον ὁ ἡμέτερος κύριος καὶ τὰ δοκοῦντά σοι δῆλα ἡμῖν τοῖς δούλοις σου ποίησον.

53 See Sempéré, "Le détournement de l'épistolaire", pp. 288–301.

54 *Diegesis Alexandrou* 30, 1–4; 33, 1–2; 34, 2–5 and 8–11, eds. Lolos/Konstantinopulos, pp. 142–56.

55 Ibid. 121, 7, eds. Lolos/Konstantinopulos, p. 168: Ὦ γλυκύτατέ μου καὶ ἠγαπημένε μου καὶ λαμπηδών μου ἥλιέ μου, ὀμμάτιά μου, Ἀλέξανδρε βασιλέα καὶ ὁλονοῦ τοῦ κόσμου βασιλέα, ἡ ἠγαπημένη ἡ μητέρα σου, ἡ Ὀλυμπιάδα, γράφω τὴν βασιλείαν σου.

56 Regarding this, see Cupane, "Literarische Bilder", pp. 306–309 (with the earlier literature). On various aspects of romance composition during this time, see Agapitos/Reinsch, *Der Roman im Byzanz der Komnenenzeit*.

letters enhancing the development of the plot nor letters recapitulating past events. But Prodromos builds upon the historiographical tradition by integrating into the narrative the diplomatic correspondence between King Briaxes of Pissa (who, in this case, represents legitimate imperial power) and his adversary, Mistylos, the leader of the pirates. Not only the content of the letters, but also the ritual of their delivery is accurately portrayed.[57] The bearer of the letter, a senior officer of the court (called a satrap, after the classical custom), kneels before the recipient Mistylos, who is seated upon a lofty throne, and hands him a sealed letter. Then this is handed over to the satrap, Gobrias, who opens the letter and reads it aloud in public. The opening and closing formulas are strictly in accordance with classical models: "The lord Bryaxes, great emperor of Pissa / greets the great emperor Mistylos … May you fare well while preserving our friendship intact."[58] Likewise is the answer perfectly composed: "Greetings to Bryaxes, the most mighty from Mistylos / from the great lord to the lord of the Pissaian fleet … Fare well, and do not overstep your own boundaries."[59]

By contrast, the novel of Eumathios Makrembolites, who tells the love story of *Hysmine and Hysminias* in 11 books of prose, incorporates only two private letters. For the author, who is strongly committed to the ekphrastic mode, epistolary discourse plays a lesser role. Both of the letters in the novel are addressed to the hero from women who love him – one letter is from the heroine Hysmine and one from Hysmine's mistress Rhodope. The letter from Hysmine marks a turning point in the narrative, since it allows for the reunion of the couple, who are separated by the trials and tribulations that the conventional plot has imposed upon them. Makrembolites adopts an analogous passage in the novel of Achilles Tatius, but he modifies it masterfully.[60] The letter from Rhodope, on the other hand, is a love letter, in which the amorous mistress informs her slave (δοῦλος) Hysminias of her love; she flirts with him in the hopes

57 The ritual as depicted is entirely consistent with the customs of Byzantine diplomacy. See Mullett, "The Language of Diplomacy".

58 *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* IV 22–73, ed. Markovich, pp. 56–58, quotation vv. 29–30 and 73 (trans. Jeffreys, pp. 67–68): ἄναξ Βρυάξης βασιλεὺς Πίσσης μέγας / χαίρειν βασιλεῖ τῷ μεγάλῳ Μιστύλῳ … Ἔρρωσο τηρῶν ὑγιᾶ τὴν ἀγάπην.

59 Ibid. IV 423–24 and 504, ed. Marcovich, pp. 70 and 72 (trans. Jeffreys, pp. 79 and 81): χαίρειν Βρυάξῃ τῷ μεγίστῳ Μιστύλος, / ἄναξ μέγας ἄνακτι Πισσαίου στόλου … Ἔρρωσο, τοὺς σοὺς μὴ παρατρέχων ὅρους.

60 *Hysmines and Hysminias* IX 9, ed. Marcovich, p. 113, l. 13–25, corresponds to Achilles Tatius V 18, 3–6; regarding this, see Mullett, "From Byzantium", pp. 7–8; Harder, "Die Funktion der Briefe", pp. 232–34; Nilsson, *Erotic Pathos*, pp. 252–53; Agapitos, "Writing", pp. 137–38.

that he will reciprocate and promises him his freedom in return.[61] Clear echoes of Achilles Tatius are present, but no corresponding letter can be found in his work. In this case, Makrembolites takes as a model Xenophon of Ephesus, who constructed a very similar situation in his *Ephesiaka*, in which the amorous mistress also writes a bold love letter to the protagonist.[62] Both pieces of writing are formally structured according to the rules of the genre. In accordance with the classical revival of his age, Makrembolites used the traditional salutatory and farewell formulas: "The maiden Hysmine to her lover Hysminias, greetings … Farewell", and respectively, "The maiden Rhodope, daughter of Sostratos, greets her lover Hysminias … Farewell."[63]

Neither in Prodromos nor in Makrembolites are there any innovations in the use of the epistolary mode. The most striking feature of all is the formal attention paid in the adoption of the ancient model: in the first case, the historiographical model, in the second, the novelistic. In contrast, Niketas Eugenianos is quite innovative in his novel *Drosilla and Charikles*. In the second book the author inserts four love letters, which Kleandros, a friend and fellow prisoner of the hero, had once sent to his beloved Kalligone to win her affection, and which he now recites at the direct request of his friend.[64] In addition, it includes short poems that draw upon the rich cache of Hellenistic and late antique epigrams and also engages the ancient corpus of fictitious erotic letters, such as those by Alciphron or Aristainetos.[65] Since the poetic outpourings of Kleandros receive no reply, the impatient lover turns to more efficient methods by supporting the written message through music and song. The compact block of letters is supplemented by a strophic song consisting of 13 stanzas, each preceded by a refrain, which is but a collage of anacreontic poems. This combination of spoken and sung words finally captivates the girl, who up to this point had been silent. The adoption of themes and images, even frequently entire verses taken from anacreontic poetry, is so extensive in Eugenianos that one can almost speak of his work as a *cento*.[66] But therein, paradoxically, lies its originality, since with regard to their topic and form the letters in *Drosilla*

61 *Hysmines and Hysminias* X 2, ed. Marcovich, p. 124, l. 9–p. 125, l. 4.

62 Concerning the echoes of Achilles Tatius, see Nilsson, *Erotic Pathos*, p. 253; the similarities to Xenephon II 5, 1–3 were pointed out by Harder, "Die Funktion der Briefe", p. 233.

63 *Hysmines and Hsminias* IX 9, 1 and 3, ed. Marcovich, p. 113, l. 13 and 24: Ὑσμίνη παρθένος Ὑσμινίᾳ τῷ ἐραστῇ χαίρειν … Ἔρρωσο; X 2, 1 and 3, ed. Marcovich, p. 124, l. 9–10 and p. 125, l. 3: Ῥοδόπη παρθένος Σωστράτου θυγάτηρ Ὑσμινίᾳ τῷ ἐραστῇ χαίρειν … Ἔρρωσο.

64 *Drosilla and Charikles* II 169–314, ed. Conca, pp. 62–69.

65 On the last point see Sykoutris, "Epistolographie", pp. 214–16; Harder, "Die Funktion der Briefe", pp. 236–39.

66 For an analysis of the motifs and composition of the poem, see Agapitos, *Narrative Structure*, pp. 211–12 and id., "Writing", pp. 148–49, as well as Cupane, "Uno, nessuno e

and Charikles correspond neither to the standards of the rhetorical handbooks nor to the actual epistolary customs of Byzantine authors.[67] On the contrary, under the pretext of the letter exchange, the voice of lyric and epigrammatic poetry, which is less compatible with the narrative mode, is introduced into the narrative discourse for the first time. For this reason letters give the genre a new dynamic – a dynamic that authors continued to use thereafter, as will be evident subsequently. Furthermore, through letters and songs the author describes the experience of love not as one coming from on high, a flash of lightning taking everything with it, but as a courtship; hence he departs from the conventions of the genre to follow the model of the epigrammatic tradition. Accordingly, the courtship is not always crowned with success.[68] In this respect, Eugenianos shows new paths for the genre of romance – paths which will be pursued further at a later time.

3.3 *Digenes Akrites*

The poem about the heroic defender of ἄκραι (frontiers), *Basileios Digenes Akrites*, brings us in an entirely different world, the contested territory between the Byzantine Empire and the Arab Caliphate. The work was probably written in Constantinople by an anonymous, educated author around the middle of the twelfth century or shortly before that time. Not only the material but also the language in the poem is innovative, because the author decided instead of learned, classicizing Greek (the *Hochsprache*) and the iambic dodecasyllable verse to use the vernacular and the fifteen-syllable (also called "political") verse. Despite the difference of material and setting and the lower literary register, the author nevertheless employs many stylistic conventions of the romance genre, for example, ekphrases of gardens, palaces, people, and objects and last but not least, letters. The anonymous author inserted into his epic-romantic story two documents whose oddities are well suited to the strange atmosphere of the poem. Both letters appear in the first part of the work, in which the poem tells the history of Digenes' parents, and both are written from mothers to their sons. Through their letters, these minor characters obtain a sharper profile and above all a voice. This is a powerful voice, which sheds new light on female authority and the mother's role in society at this time. In the

centomila", pp. 459–61; for connections to the rhetorical practice of the *progymnasmata* see Harder, "Die Funktion der Briefe", pp. 235–38.

67 On this point, see Mullett, "From Byzantium", pp. 3–5, 9–10.

68 See, for instance, the unhappy courtship of Kleinias by Drosilla, which is represented in songs: IV 156–220, ed. Conca, pp. 107–10; or the love letter from Chrysilla, the wife of the abruptly deceased barbarian ruler Kratylos, to the hero: V 197–237, ed. Conca, pp. 131–33; see also Cupane, "Metamorphosen", pp. 31–33.

first letter, the mother of the kidnapped *kore* implores her five sons, under the threat of maternal curse, to rescue their sister; in the second, the emir's mother castigates her son with harsh and angry words for his conversion to Christianity and his marriage to the daughter of an enemy and orders him, also under the threat of her curse, to return immediately.[69] In both instances, the mothers' letters trigger immediate action. The brothers of the *kore* depart and save their sister in a victorious battle; only then do they send a short answer to their mother's letter to announce the upcoming wedding of their sister to the emir, who has fallen in love with her.[70] The emir likewise obeys the command from his mother without delay and as a consequence incurs the distrust of his in-laws and the tears of his wife. The author shows no such interest, however, in the love letters the emir "sent to his beloved every day", the contents of which he conveys only in a laconic way: "Do not be grieved, I beg you: rather all of you make this prayer."[71]

3.4 *The Vernacular Romance of the Palaiologan Period*

The romance of the early Palaiologan period continues the romance tradition of the twelfth century and draws upon essentially the same arsenal of topics, images, and rhetorical and stylistic methods, but it renders them in the lower, vernacular register.[72] *Libistros and Rhodamne* is the first in this group of texts. It was probably written in the second half of the thirteenth century, possibly under the early emperors of the Palaiologan dynasty in reconquered Constantinople.[73] The traditional love story with a separation and reunion is artfully narrated in the first person and begins *mediis in rebus*, where the primary narrator reports facts that were told to him by the protagonists themselves. The love letters of the two heroes, as well as their accompanying love songs (καταλόγια) and the messages sent from Libistros to a eunuch helping them, play a significantly more important role in the narrative structure of the

69 *Digenes Akrites* (*Grottaferrata version*) I 70–81 and II 53–98, ed. and trans. Jeffreys, pp. 6–7 and 26–31; see also Mullett, "From Byzantium", pp. 6–7. For an overview of the Digenes Poem, its different versions, its generic status as well as its peculiar position within Byzantine literature, see now Jouanno, *Shared Spaces 1: Digenis Akritis, the Two-Blood Border Lord*.

70 Ibid. II 10–12, ed. and trans. Jeffreys, pp. 2–25.

71 Ibid. III 38–39, ed. and trans. Jeffreys, pp. 46–47: καθ᾽ἑκάστην ἐξέπεμπε γραφὰς τῇ ποθητῇ του· / Μὴ λυπηθῇς, παρακαλῶ, τοῦτο δ᾽ εὔχεσθαι μᾶλλον.

72 For a general study of the texts discussed here, see Beaton, *Medieval Greek Romance*, pp. 91–227 and, more recently, Cupane, *In the Realm of Eros*.

73 Another opinion is held by Panagiotis Agapitos, who makes the case for an earlier date and situates the text at the Nicaean court; see his "The Court of Amorous Dominion", esp. pp. 409–16 and introduction to *Libistros and Rhodamne* (*recension α*), pp. 48–55.

novel than in the other texts discussed so far. In terms of length, together they take up over a thousand verses and thus amount to a good quarter of the entire work.[74] The author undoubtedly took inspiration from Niketas Eugenianos; he cleverly dressed the origin and development of the love story in epistolary form and, like his predecessor, chose a decidedly lyrical tone. Yet, the necessity of the letter exchange is more pronounced here than in the narrative situation constructed by Eugenianos: letters (πιττάκι, χαρτί, χαρτίτσι) – which are shot into the castle with a bow – are also the only possible means of contact for the spatially separated lovers (Rhodamne is within the Castle of Silver, Libistros outside). Admittedly, at the beginning the reader indeed hears only the voice of the hero (the first six letters go unanswered), as is the case in Eugenianos, but then Libistros's rhetoric of love softens the resistance of the haughty maiden. The conversation between the lovers begins and continues until the first meeting, which puts in motion the previously static action, and culminates in the wedding of the protagonists, whereby the first part of the novel finds its conclusion. Structurally, the function of the love letters is not purely ornamental or dilatory; rather they are fitting for the important task of telling and revealing the love story of the heroes. Through the courtship of the man and the reaction of the woman, the reader can experience for the first time in Byzantine literature the different phases of a nascent romantic relationship – including all the ups and downs, the steps forward and backward – all the way up to the first meeting of the lovers. From this point onwards, the narrative pace, which had previously been slow and almost static, becomes quick and energetic. Time once again begins to flow and the novel's plot is given, so to speak, a new starting point. Through the letters the heroine also receives a voice – as well as a distinct personality – even before she actively enters the stage of the tale. It is no accident that the documents sent and received play a special role directly affecting the female protagonist. The second epistolary cycle, which appears towards the end of the novel, demonstrates this further. Finally reunited after a two-year separation, the heroes make their way home together, along with their faithful friend Klitobon (who also has the role of the main narrator). During the trip they remember the origins of their love and in turns recite from memory six more letters that Libistros had omitted in his earlier description of events. It is Rhodamne who asks whether the lover had really told their friend about the letters and calls upon him to fill in what he had forgotten:

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74 *Libistros and Rhodamne* (*recension α*) 1295–2279 and 4085–4273, ed. Agapitos, pp. 306–44 and 414–20. On the love letters, see Agapitos, "Ἀφηγηματικὴ σημασία" and Cupane, "Uno nessuno e centomila", pp. 447–64.

> She asked whether he had really recited all of her letters to their friend. / And he began to tell, / how many love letters written by the beautiful girl / he had recited to their friend and how many of his own, / and the letters that he had earlier forgotten / he recited to me then.[75]

None of these poetic love letters contains salutatory or closing formulas. The anonymous author in this respect as well follows the example of Niketas Eugenianos, who likewise omits them entirely. Although in both cases the inserted letters were definitely received as such – in Eugenianos relevant manuscript marginalia testify to this fact, in *Libistros* likewise the rubrics prefixed before particular sections[76] – the authors were more concerned with the lyric content than fidelity to epistolary conventions. In neither author are the letters formally distinguished from the songs that are also inserted into the narrative: vocal and written messages are the same in significance and style, it is only the medium that varies.

The three existing versions of the *Libistros* romance[77] testify to its popularity into the second half of the fifteenth century, but its influence on subsequent romance composition is more noticeable, to a particular extent in the so-called Byzantine *Achilleis*, preserved in three different versions; the influence of the *Libistros* romance is especially striking in version N (probably from the mid-fourteenth century). The romantic relationship of the heroes in this version is clearly patterned after *Libistros*. Achilles as well must undergo a courtship phase, until at last he can secure the affection of his castle-dwelling princess. He also achieves his goal by writing *billets doux* in his own hand and sending them to his beloved via one of her ladies. Unlike Rhodamne, the princess, who remains anonymous, responds immediately, although she is initially dismissive, and between the lovers a correspondence develops, albeit not so extensive

75 *Libistros and Rhodamne* (*recension α*) 4078–83, ed. Agapitos, pp. 413–14: καὶ ἁπλῶς διὰ τὰ πιττάκια της ἐρώτησεν ἡ κόρη / ἂν τὰ εἶπεν πρὸς τὸν φίλον του, ποσῶς ἂν τὰ ἠφηγήθην. / Καὶ ἐκεῖνος ἐπεχείρισεν τὸ νὰ τὴν ἀφηγῆται / πόσας γραφὰς ἐρωτικὰς τῆς ὡραιωμένης κόρης / εἶπεν καὶ πρὸς τὸν φίλον του καὶ πόσας ἰδικάς του, / καὶ ὅσες γραφὲς τὸν ἔλαθαν τότε νὰ μὲ τὰς εἴπῃ.

76 See, e.g., *Drosilla and Charikles*, app. ad. v 167, 202, 240, 284, ed. Conca, pp. 61, 63, 65, 67 (always ἐπιστολή) and *Libistros and Rodamne* (*recension α*) 1297 (γράμματα), 1375 (πιττάκι), 1492 (πιττάκι), 1564 (γραφή), 1820 (ἀντιπίτταKον), 1898 (πονοαντιπίττακον), ed. Agapitos, pp. 306, 309, 314, 317, 327, 330; concerning rubrics in vernacular romance, see Agapitos/Smith, "Scribes and Manuscripts"; see also Agapitos, "Writing", p. 161, n. 183 (on the *Achilleis*); concerning the marginalia in romances from the Komnenian period, see Conca, "Scribi e lettori".

77 *Libistros and Rhodamne* (*recension E*), ed. Lambert; *Libistros and Rodhamne* (*recension V*), ed. Lendari.

(six letters in total). This correspondence, along with the active support of Eros himself, leads to the girl's capitulation and to the first erotic encounter.[78]

In the love letters, the author of the *Achilleis* also ignores the formal rules of the epistolary genre. However, this is not the case in the work's only other letter, in which Achilles appears not as a lover but as a general. After his stunning victory over the enemies of his father's empire, the young prince announces the good news to his father in an official letter, which is furnished with a formal salutation: "The servant of your imperial rule and your brave son, I congratulate you, my lord, again I congratulate you."[79]

The tradition of inserted love letters is likewise carried on in later novels. Thus, the last discovered of the vernacular romances, the *Tale of Alexander and Semiramis* – an adaptation of a Turkish original preserved in two versions (B and S), most likely written in the first half of the fifteenth century – features some love letters between the heroes, in which the topic and wording closely adheres to the model of the *Libistros* and the *Achilleis*.[80] These letters also lack any salutatory or closing formulas; they are written by the sender himself, sealed with care, delivered by servants and read in isolation, because of their private nature: "He sat down, wrote the letter, sealed it, and handed it over to him / he sent it to Semiramis, so that she would take notice / … / she sat down on the bed and read the letter."[81]

The vernacular novels do not use official letters, because their world is generally far removed from the world of the imperial chancery and state administration. The only exception is *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe*. This romance displays a much higher literary register and was written in all likelihood in the first half of the fourteenth century by Andronikos Palaiologos, a nephew of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos.[82] It incorporates two letters sent from eunuchs to the unnamed emperor, who plays the role of an adversary, and an answer written by the emperor's own hand.[83] The eunuchs' first letter is

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78 *Achilleis*, 864–941. 1021–32, ed. and trans. Cupane, pp. 384–91, 396–97 (= 949–1013. 1098–1109, ed. Smith, pp. 44–46, 49); on the Achilleis see now Lavagnini, *Tales of the Trojan War*, pp. 240–55.

79 Ibid. 635–36, ed. and trans. Cupane, pp. 368–69 (= 683–84, ed. Smith, p. 36): Δοῦλος τῆς βασιλείας σου καὶ τολμηρὸς υἱός σου / συγχαίρομαί σε, δέσποτα, πάλιν συγχαίρομαί σε.

80 *Alexander and Semiramis* (*version B*) 1163–1217, ed. and trans. Moennig, pp. 254–65.

81 Ibid. 1194–95 and 1199, p. 265: Καθίζει, γράφει τὸ χαρτί, βουλώνει, παραδίδει / στέλνει το τὴν Σεμίραμην διὰ νὰ τὸ ἀναγνωρίσει / … / Εἰς τὸ κλινάρι ἔκατσε καὶ τὸ καρτὶ ἀναγνώθει.

82 Concerning the question of authorship, which has not yet been resolved, see the overview in Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance*, pp. 104–05 and 246, n. 16, and more recently Cupane, *In the Realm of Eros*, pp. 95–97, 114–15.

83 *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe* 2126–37. 2250–76, ed. Cupane, pp. 184–86, 192–94 (the eunuchs' letters, both indicated by γραφή); ibid. 2300–19, ed. Cupane, pp. 194–96 (the emperor's πρόσταγμα).

marked by a formal salutation ("We, your servants, congratulate your imperial rule") and closing formula ("We, your servants, have ventured to write you about this"). Their second letter starts abruptly *mediis in rebus*, but it contains the closing formula: "Hence, we report this matter to your exalted Majesty in writing."[84] These letters play a significant role in the plot: they bring about the escalation of events and thus also introduce the cathartic happy ending. In terms of content, they are polar opposites. While the first letter communicates the desired improvement in Chrysorrhoe's state of mind, the second reveals to the ruler the real reasons for this improvement by uncovering the nightly meetings of the protagonists. The reply to the second letter is an imperial πρόσταγμα (ordinance), in which the emperor orders the arrest of Kallimachos, who is disguised as a gardener. Like the first two, this document also imitates the formal style of the chancery. The salutation is lacking, because in his agitation the ruler skips straight to the point, but the official self-appellation ("My Majesty"), as well as the imperatives ("I order in writing") and the traditional closing wish ("farewell") are present.[85] The author was evidently well acquainted with the official terminology.[86]

In conclusion, inserted letters play different roles in the Byzantine novel depending on the time of composition and the purpose of the texts. While the *Alexander romances*, strongly rooted in historiographical discourse, even in the latest versions consistently feature intensive diplomatic and official correspondence and incorporate extended letters that summarize prior events, later novelists use these much more sparingly. Theodore Prodromos, for whom official and military affairs were key interests, inserts only three (albeit perfectly composed) diplomatic letters in his narrative, whereas Makrembolites, with his two letters written by women, remains committed to the tradition of the ancient novel, albeit setting his own individual accents to the generic conventions. A spark of innovation first appears in Niketas Eugenianos. He makes extensive use of letters, but he uses them entirely to articulate the discourse of love and desire, in contrast to the ancient and contemporary romance tradition. Moreover, through the inclusion of other sources, which had not previously been used in romance narrative, he imparts an innovative lyric tone to his novel. His paradigm became popular. Some of the later vernacular novels took the same path and used love letters to portray the emergence and growth

84 Ibid. 2127 and 2137, ed. Cupane, pp. 184 and 186: Συγχαίροντες τῷ κράτει σου γράφομε οἱ πιστοί σου / … / Ὡς δοῦλοι γοῦν τολμήσαντες γράφομε περὶ τούτου; 2274–75, ibid., p. 194: … Ὅθεν καὶ χάριν τούτου / γράφοντες ἀναφέρομεν τῷ σῷ μεγίστῳ κράτει.

85 Ibid. 2302, 2306, 2317, ed. Cupane, pp. 194 and 196: Τῷ κράτει μου προσήγγισαν γράμματα τῶν χειρῶν σας / … / Ὅμως προστάσσω, γράφω σας· … / … / … Ἔρρωσθε, οἱ τρεῖς εὐνούχοι.

86 On this point, see Hunger, "Un roman byzantine", p. 417.

of the heroes' otherwise conventional love story. A striking example of this new style is the anonymous *Libistros and Rhodamne* with its extensive love letters, which are split into two unequal blocks. In a way, these letters frame the action of the novel and form a small, compact lyric anthology. Since the epistolary genre had been used by and large in the Byzantine novel only in a sporadic and conventional way, in the *Libistros*, with its lyric garb and new linguistic register, the genre has found one of its most authentic and powerful expressions.[87]

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PART 4

Byzantine Epistolography and (Post-)Modern Theory

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CHAPTER 16

Letters and Network Analysis

Johannes Preiser-Kapeller

1 Introduction

While the term "network" has been used abundantly in historical research and beyond in recent years, the actual number of studies taking into account the elaborate concepts and methodology of network analysis as developed over decades is growing, but still limited. As Clair Lemercier aptly remarked in her introduction to historical network analysis: "The network vocabulary is often used in a purely metaphorical way, without reference to any more or less systematic information on precise ties between specific individuals or organizations."[1]

In the field of Byzantine studies, epistolography was the first phenomenon ever to be analyzed within the framework of network analysis in the pioneer study by Margaret Mullett on the letter collection of the metropolitan Theophylact of Ohrid in 1997.[2] Since then, some scholars have made use at least of some concepts and visualization tools introduced by Mullett,[3] but it was only in 2011 that Adam M. Schor presented a similarly elaborate study on the social network of Theodoret of Cyrus in fifth-century Syria, also on the basis of his letters.[4] As well as this, in 2009 Giovanni Ruffini used quantitative tools to reconstruct social networks in sixth-century Byzantine Egypt.[5] Equally, the author of this chapter has presented various studies with different approaches from the wide field of network concepts in the last years.[6] In 2012,

1 Lemercier, "Formale Methoden", p. 18. See also Reinhard, *Freunde und Kreaturen*; Düring/Eumann/Stark/von Keyserlingk, *Handbuch Historische Netzwerkforschung*; Jullien, "Netzwerkanalyse in der Mediävistik".
2 Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*.
3 See, for instance, Grünbart, "'Tis love"; Riehle, "Kreta".
4 Schor, *Theodoret's People*, pp. 9–13.
5 Ruffini, *Social Networks*.
6 See the bibliography below. In addition see also Mitsiou, "Networks of Nicaea". For further examples of historical network analysis, see also Müller/Neurath, *Historische Netzwerkanalysen*, and the website <http://historicalnetworkresearch.org/>.

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Mullett and Schor also organized a Colloquium on "The Social Network in Byzantium and Its Neighbors" at Dumbarton Oaks.[7]

The obvious reluctance of historians and philologists to adapt tools of structural network analysis can also be connected to the conceptual and terminological divide between humanities and formal sciences; already in 1994, Emirbayer and Goodwin stated: "The abstruse terminology and state-of-the-art mathematical sophistication of this unique approach to the study of social structure seem to have prevented many of these 'outsiders' from venturing anywhere near it."[8] Also in those studies on Byzantine history and literature which adapted the discourses of network analysis, concepts reflecting on the qualitative character of social connections were and continue to be more frequent than quantitative tools of structural analysis.[9] Thus, the main aim of this chapter is the presentation of basic concepts of this aspect of network research and the demonstration of the application of some of these tools on a well-established case study of network analysis for Byzantine epistolography: the data collected by Mullett from the letters of Theophylact of Ohrid. Given the limited space available here, I will confine myself to summing up some of the more illustrative results; a documentation of all implications of these tools would demand a longer paper of a detailedness comparable to that of Mullet's original or Schor's recent study. But hopefully the paper will provide scholars undertaking such studies with a first impression of what network analysis could contribute to her or his research.

2 Basic Concepts and Levels of Quantitative Network Analysis

The significance of relations for any social analysis was of course established by various classics of social theory such as Norbert Elias, who stated in 1965:

> To study individuals first as isolates and to derive the figurations they form together from what they are without the patterns of their living together,

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7 See <http://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/events/byzantine-symposia-and-colloquia/the-social-network-in-byzantium-and-its-neighbors/colloquium-the-social-network-in-byzantium-and-its-neighbors>. See Gaul, "All the Emperor's Men" for a paper given at this event.

8 Emirbayer/Goodwin, "Network Analysis", p. 1446. See also Lemercier, "Formale Methoden", Gramsch, *Das Reich als Netzwerk der Fürsten*, pp. 12–86, and Jullien, "Netzwerkanalyse in der Mediävistik", for helpful discussions of these issues.

9 For an impressive combination of both aspects see also Rosé, "Reconstitution, représentation graphique et analyse". For a more qualitative discussion see Gaul, "All the Emperor's Men".

> is a confusion of thought, impeding the analysis of these figurations … Individuals are always found in figurations, and configurations of individuals are irreducible. To think of a single individual as if it originally were socially independent, or of individuals here and there regardless of their relations with each other, is a baseless starting point.[10]

Network analysis claims "not only that ties matter, but that they are organized in a significant way, that this or that individual has an interesting position in terms of his or her ties".[11] One central aim of network analysis is the identification of these structures of social relations which emerge from the sum of interactions and connections between individuals within a group or society and at the same time influence the scope of the actions of everyone entangled in such relations.

For this purpose, data on the categories, intensity, frequency and dynamics of interactions and relations between individuals is systematically collected in a way which allows for further mathematical analysis. This information is organized in the form of matrices (with rows and columns, Table 16.1) and graphs (with nodes and edges (or links), Fig. 16.1–11), which are not only instruments of data collection and visualization, but also the basis for further mathematical operations (matrix algebra and graph theory).[12] Over the last two decades, more and more highly sophisticated mathematical methods for the analysis of large scale complex networks have been developed, especially since natural scientists ("sociophysics") have discovered the field of social network analysis, originally developed within sociology.[13] While it is often useful to experiment with these approaches for the purpose of historical analysis, the instruments of the "basic toolkit" of quantitative network analysis can also be presented without the help of a complex mathematical formalism, as is the intention of the present chapter.

In order to create a matrix or a graph, a definition of the categories and number of nodes (the elements connected within the network, such as individuals, texts, localities, etc.) and links (the relations and interactions) is necessary. Modern software tools allow for the integration of various categories, or "modes", of nodes within one "multi-modal" network model, as the researcher

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10 Elias/Scotson, *Etablierte und Außenseiter*, pp. 72, 264–65.

11 Lemercier, "Formale Methoden", p. 22. See also Erickson, "Social Networks and History".

12 Wassermann/Faust, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 92–166; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 9–16; Burkhardt, *Der hansische Bergenhandel*, pp. 55–59.

13 See Wassermann/Faust, *Social Network Analysis* and Scott/Carrington, *The Sage Handbook of Social Network Analysis*, for the sociological tradition, and Newman, *Networks*, for the mathematical basis and a physicist's approach.

may define them on the basis of her or his material.[14] For the present case study on Theophylact, for instance, I created the categories of "individuals", "letters" and "localities". More problematic is the delimitation of the number of nodes; "for pragmatic reasons we treat network nodes as a countable set. In social reality, the and-so-on of contacts is infinite."[15] Several elaborate methods for the definition of the boundaries of a network have been developed.[16] In Byzantine studies, source evidence itself very much limits information on the theoretically "infinite and-so-on of contacts". A pragmatic approach for a scholar working with a specific stock of source evidence such as a letter collection may be to integrate all individuals documented in the letters into the network, augmenting the data with information from other sources (e.g., other letter-collections, historical writing, archival material) as far as possible. She or he will still end up with an easily countable set of nodes. A specific approach for network delimitation especially applicable to letter collections containing the epistles of a single individual is the "ego-network". In this case, one selects an individual and tries to survey her or his connections to all other individuals documented in the sources as well as the connections between these individuals (this would be the "first order zone" in Mullett's study of Theophylact of Ohrid). A rich literature exists on the specific approaches for the analysis of "ego-networks".[17]

Even more complex is the definition of the categories of links. The vocabulary for the description of relationships in a source can be very large in number, variable and ambiguous. At the same time even established terms such as "friendship" or "love" change in their meaning over the centuries and/or follow traditional conceptions.[18] Again, it is up to the scholar, who has an intimate knowledge of his or her material, to extract this information and to aggregate it into a number of manageable categories – Mullett's study is already an impressive example in this regard – which can be integrated into a "multiplex"

14 de Nooy/Mrvar/Batagelj, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, pp. 3–11; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 16–17.

15 Holzer, *Netzwerke*, p. 102.

16 Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 65–67. See also Burkhardt, *Der hansische Bergenhandel*, pp. 49–51.

17 Beunza/Ruiz, "Redes sociales"; de Nooy/Mrvar/Batagelj, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, pp. 144–50; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 118–19; Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 178–90; Crossley et al., *Social Network Analysis for Ego-Nets*. See also below on the practical application.

18 See Mullett, "Byzantium: A Friendly Society?"; ead., *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 111–23. See also McLean, *The Art of the Network*.

network model.[19] In addition, an elaborate and helpful categorization of network ties has been developed by R.H. Atkin already in 1974, also used by Borgatti et al. in 2009:[20] they establish four categories of "dyadic phenomena" (a dyad being a set of two nodes and the link(s) between them).

(1) Similarities: two nodes share attributes such as demographic characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, locations or group memberships. This "increases the probabilities of certain relations and dyadic events".
(2) Social relations, under which are subsumed "commonly defined role-based relations" such as kinship relations or friendship and "ties of affection" ("liking", "disliking", "love") or of "cognitive awareness" ("knowing").
(3) Interactions: these are "behavior-based ties" in the context of social relations, such as day-to-day interaction. As Borgatti writes, these are "discrete and separate events that may occur frequently but then stop, such as talking with, fighting with, or having lunch with".
(4) Flows: these are relation-based exchanges or transfers of resources, information or influence between nodes.

This differentiation between the framework for interaction (similarities, social relations) and actual interactions and flows allows us also to take into account the "temporality of ties"[21] and the dynamics of networks: relationships may be established, maintained (by interactions and flows), modified or terminated. Individuals appear in the social circle of an individual and disappear (also in the sources). Yet, standard tools of network analysis (still) force us to integrate these changes into one more or less static model. The common solution to capture at least part of these dynamics is to define "time-slices", divided through meaningful caesurae in the development of the object of research, again as defined by the researcher knowing her or his material, and to model distinct networks for each of them (for a simple example see below). One has then also to decide which interactions and relations to register. For instance, does a single exchange of letters qualify for the integration into a network model intended to cover the structure of relations of an individual for a decade, for instance?[22] In a historical perspective, letters are of course a most important

19 Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, pp. 35–38. See also Mitsiou, "Networks of Nicaea" and Preiser-Kapeller, "Networks of Border Zones" on the concept of multiplexity in a Byzantine context.

20 Cited after Scott/Carrington, *The Sage Handbook of Social Network Analysis*, pp. 44–45. See also Burkhardt, *Der hansische Bergenhandel*, pp. 43–49, for a similar approach to medieval networks.

21 Lemercier, "Formale Methoden", pp. 26–27.

22 de Nooy/Mrvar/Batagelj, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, pp. 92–95; Lemercier, "Formale Methoden", pp. 28–29. For a sample of this technique see also Rosé, "Reconstitution, représentation graphique et analyse".

piece of evidence for interaction and (if frequently exchanged) the maintenance of a social relation between individuals, and thus are also a prime object of network analysis.[23]

Closely connected to these questions is the problem of completeness and the statistical significance of data. One has to be aware that network graphs and the databases that are used to build them concentrate on one or a few types of ties between a limited set of actors, "deliberately ignoring the fact that these actors necessarily have other relationships among themselves and with outsiders".[24] This is not only a question of practicability, but also of available information: "It is impossible for us to find all the relationships that have been maintained only by a single person. Even more impossible is such an attempt for a whole network of relationships in a larger group of people … We know from the beginning that our data set is not complete". Yet, we work on the assumption "that it is possible to find enough relational data in the sources to show general structures and developments".[25] Fragmentariness is a challenge not only for network analysis, but for any historical study – and as in any other case, it is up to the scholarly community to decide if results are convincing.[26] What is more, despite mathematical formalism, such an approach demands at least the same amount of knowledge, reflection and historian's talent to create meaningful and reliable results as other methods. This is especially true for letter collections, if we take into account that they normally come to us in a form revised by the author, who therefore has already very much pre-selected and limited the perspective on her or his social network.[27] Yet, at the same time this enables us to inspect those relations she or he regarded as especially representative or relevant, and provides valuable insight into the construction of social networks in Byzantium.

Once a quantifiable network model has finally been created, it allows for a structural analysis on three main levels:

(1) The level of single nodes: respective measures take into account the immediate environment of a node, such as "degree", which simply measures

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23 See Beunza/Ruiz, "Redes sociales"; Bergs, *Social Networks*.

24 Lemercier, "Formale Methoden", p. 24.

25 Burkhardt, *Der hansische Bergenhandel*, p. 354; Düring, "How Reliable Are Centrality Measures?". There exist several mathematical tools to "reconstruct" missing links, but they deserve a legitimate amount of skepticism from a historian's point of view; see Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 78–79.

26 See also Lemercier, "Formale Methoden", pp. 24–25; Düring/Eumann/Stark/von Keyserlingk, *Handbuch Historische Netzwerkforschung*.

27 See Chapter 17, pp. 477–90 in this volume.

the number of direct links of a node to other nodes.[28] Other tools measure the relative centrality of a node within the entire network, due to its position on many or few possible paths between nodes otherwise unconnected – the measure of "betweenness", which can be interpreted as a potential for intermediation, for instance.[29] The measure of "eigenvector" indicates the centrality of a node due to its connections to nodes which in turn are central because of their high number of connections and thus also provide "indirect" centrality for a node less well-connected. It would therefore identify those who know maybe only a few, but the "right" people.[30]

(2) The level of groups of nodes: these include sets of two nodes (dyads), which can be distinguished as "null" (no link exists between the two nodes), "directed" (or "asymmetric", meaning that an interaction leads from one node to the other, e.g., "A sends a letter to B") or "symmetric" (leading in both directions, e.g., "A and B exchange letters") as well as being "un-weighted" (only the presence or absence of a link is taken into account) or "weighted" (indicating the quantity of an interaction, such as the number of letters exchanged between A and B, see also the example below). Directions and quantities can be attributed to links by the researcher also a priori when defining categories of connections as described above.[31] Even more elaborate approaches exist for the analysis of "triads" (sets of three nodes) and the dynamics of relations within them, which in turn influence the structuring of an entire network. An important assumption is the idea of "triadic closure": if A is friends with B and C, there is a high probability that B also becomes friends with C, for instance, through the intermediation of A, who recommends B to C in a letter.[32] In a sequence of several time-slices, this assumption could be tested for a given network. Such a "closed" triad is also considered a

28 Wassermann/Faust, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 178–83; de Nooy/Mrvar/Batagelj, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, pp. 63–64; Newman, *Networks*, pp. 168–69; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 96–99.

29 Burt, *Brokerage and Closure*; Wassermann/Faust, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 188–92; de Nooy/Mrvar/Batagelj, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, pp. 131–33; Newman, *Networks*, pp. 185–93; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 103–07.

30 Newman, *Networks*, pp. 169–72; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 101–03.

31 Wassermann/Faust, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 505–55; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 135–40; Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, pp. 21–22.

32 See Burt, *Brokerage and Closure*. "Triadic closure" is a common phenomenon in epistolography, see Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrod*, pp. 201–22, on how Theophylact made use of his network in this and similar ways, also with some graphs. See also Beunza/Ruiz, "Redes sociales"; McLean, *The Art of the Network*.

"balanced" one. The concept of "structural balance" was developed by the psychologist Fritz Heider and suggests that "unbalanced" triads (A is friends with B and C, but B and C are enemies, for instance) tend to become "balanced" (B and C become friends or A terminates the friendship with one of them). In addition, triads can also be categorized according to the kind of dyads (null, asymmetric, symmetric) existing within them. Several tools ("triadic census") exist to quantify the percentages of the 16 possible types of triads within a network (see Table 16.4 and Fig. 16.12).[33] The preponderance of one type or the other also influences the tendency towards "clustering" within a network – which can also be expressed in an overall "clustering coefficient"[34] – meaning the existence of groups of nodes more closely connected to each other than to the rest of the network. If all nodes within such a group are directly connected with each other, we call them a "clique".[35] In order to detect such cliques and clusters, an inspection of a visualization of a network can be helpful. Common visualization tools arrange nodes which are more closely connected to one another ("spring embedder" algorithms) and thus provide a good impression of such structures – Lothar Krempel speaks of "social topographies", which allow for orientation within a network similar to maps.[36] For precise identification, there are various algorithms of "group detection", which aim at an optimal "partition" of the network. Again, it is up to the researcher to decide if one of these tools provides meaningful results. If this is the case, it is of course of interest to see whether the presence of nodes within such clusters can be related to specific qualitative attributes ("similarities", as defined above), for instance.[37] A different approach is the concept of "structural equivalence" of nodes. Here, nodes are not attributed to the same "block" because of being connected to each other, but because they have the same (or very similar) structure of ties to other actors. Within a network of a school, one would thus

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33 Wassermann/Faust, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 220–43; de Nooy/Mrvar/Batagelj, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, pp. 84–92, 205–12; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 140–47; Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, pp. 22–26. See also Gramsch, *Das Reich als Netzwerk der Fürsten*, esp. pp 34–52, for a magisterial application of triad dynamics on a medieval case-study.

34 Newman, *Networks*, pp. 262–66. It measures the average probability that two nodes connected to a node are also directly connected themselves.

35 Wassermann/Faust, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 254–57.

36 See Krempel, *Visualisierung komplexer Strukturen*.

37 de Nooy/Mrvar/Batagelj, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, pp. 66–77; Newman, *Networks*, pp. 372–82; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 151–61; Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, pp. 46–49; Burkhardt, *Der hansische Bergenhandel*, pp. 52–54.

encounter a block of "teachers" and one of "disciples", between which similar structures of relations could be identified. Again, several tools of "blockmodeling" exist, which have to be evaluated by the researcher.[38]

(3) The level of the entire network: a large amount of key figures also exists for the entire structure emerging from links between the nodes. Basic ones are the size (i.e., number of nodes), the maximum distance between two nodes, expressed in the number of links necessary to find a path from one to the other ("diameter"), and the average distance (or path length) between two nodes.[39] "Density" indicates the ratio of possible links actually present in a network: theoretically, all nodes in a network could be connected to each other (this would be a density of "1"). A density of "0.05" for instance, indicates that 5% of these possible links exist within a network. The higher the number of nodes, the higher of course the number of possible links – thus, in general, density tends to decrease with the size of a network. Therefore, it only makes sense to compare the densities of networks of (almost) the same size. Density can be interpreted as an indicator of the relative "cohesion" of a network.[40] Other measurements are based on the equal or unequal distribution of quantitative characteristics such as degree or betweenness (see above) among the nodes. A high "degree centralization", for instance, indicates that many links are concentrated on a relatively small number of nodes.[41] These distributions can also be statistically analyzed and visualized for all nodes by counting the frequency of single degree or betweenness values and used for the comparison of networks.[42] Moreover, more sophisticated concepts take into account the strength of a partition into clusters ("modularity") or the general strength of connections between similar or dissimilar nodes ("assortativity"), also with regard to nodes of similar or very different degree values, for instance. These measures can be connected to tendencies of polarization within a network structure.[43]

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38 Wassermann/Faust, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 461–93; de Nooy/Mrvar/Batagelj, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, pp. 259–85; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 176–94. For a historical perspective, see Erickson, "Social Networks and History", and Padgett/Ansell, "Robust Action" for a magisterial historical study using blockmodeling.

39 de Nooy/Mrvar/Batagelj, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, pp. 125–31; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 171–72.

40 Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 166–68; Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, p. 29.

41 Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 168–70.

42 Newman, *Networks*, pp. 243–61; Barabási, *Network Science*, pp. 78–82.

43 Newman, *Networks*, pp. 220–31, 372–82; Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, pp. 116–19; Barabási, Network Science, pp. 236–38.

As for the definition of categories and numbers of nodes and links, the researcher has to evaluate the various instruments and to make a selection that provides useful and reproducible results. The user-friendliness of modern software tools sometimes makes them tempting to use as "black boxes" in order to produce a variety of figures without being aware of the underlying concepts and limitations. Therefore, also a constant discussion of results within the scholarly community is necessary.

3 Mapping and Analysing the Relations within a Byzantine Letter Collection

As outlined above, I adapted the data on the collection of letters of Metropolitan Theophylact of Ochrid for a quantitative network model. This not only allows us to use an excellently prepared dataset, but also enables us to connect the results of quantitative analysis with the ones of the more qualitatively oriented study of Margaret Mullett.[44]

The collection used by Mullett contains 135 letters which can be dated to the years 1080–1108, mainly from Theophylact's tenure as Archbishop of Ochrid (*c.*1088–1125) in what the Byzantines then called Bulgaria (roughly modern-day Republic of North Macedonia). The letters not only contain information on their addressees and their places of destination, but also on the character and content of Theophylact's relations to the addressees as well as to other individuals and between them. This data had already been systematically extracted from the texts by Mullett. I used it to create a 3-mode-network of letters (135), individuals (addressed by or mentioned in the letters: 111) and localities (places of dispatch or destination of letters: 23). These three categories of nodes are connected via two categories of links: between letters and individuals (359 links) and between letters and localities (208 links), thus using the letters, the central pieces of evidence, also as intermediaries of relations within our network model. This is also illustrated in the visualization (Fig. 16.1, top left): we find Theophylact as well as his places of residence in the center, surrounded by the letters, which in turn are connected to the places and individuals of destination as well as further individuals to whom Theophylact refers. While

44 All network models were created and analyzed by the author with the help of the software tools *Pajek* (<http://mrvar.fdv.uni-lj.si/pajek/>) and *ORA* (<http://www.casos.cs.cmu.edu/projects/ora/>). Another useful tool for the organization and storage of historical relational data developed in Vienna by S. Eichert and A. Watzinger is the open source database system OpenAtlas (<http://www.openatlas.eu/>).

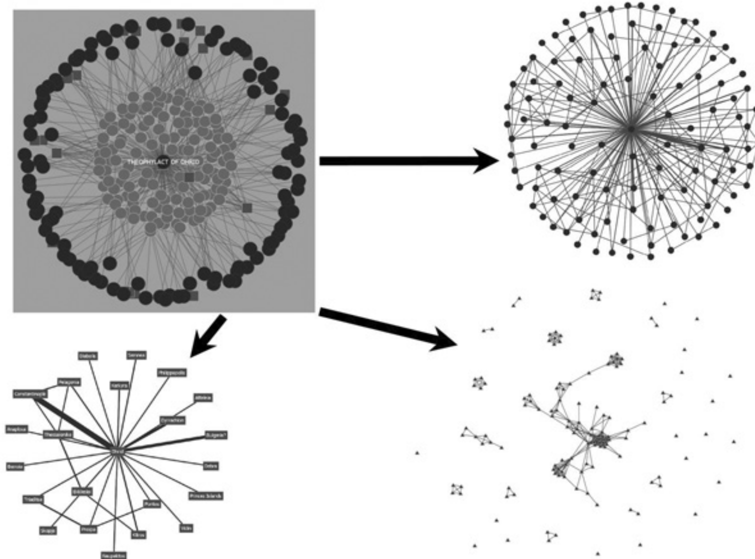

FIGURE 16.1 Extraction of the 1-mode-networks of localities (bottom left), of letters (bottom right) and of individuals (top right) from a 3-mode-network of letters, localities and individuals on the basis of the data in the letter collection of Metropolitan Theophylact of Ochrid (top left)
CREATED BY J. PREISER-KAPELLER, 2013

this graph provides a first impression of the relatively complex structure of relational data, we use it mainly to arrange the material for further operations in order to extract the connections contained within the collection. Tools of network analysis allow us to transform such a multi-modal network in several networks with a single category of nodes (1-mode-network) on the basis of the assumption that nodes of one category provide connections between nodes of another one, and thus nodes of this category can be directly linked to each other.[45] In total, I created three 1-mode-networks from the 3-mode-network (Fig. 16.1).

First, I extracted a network of 23 localities, connected through 29 links of different weight, depending on the number of letters exchanged between them – the strongest links existing between Ochrid and Constantinople (33), Ochrid and several unspecified places of destination within the Bulgarian church province (15), and Ochrid and Dyrrhachion (11). In this way, we can visualize the range and intensity of geographical relations documented in

45 de Nooy/Mrvar/Batagelj, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, pp. 103–08.

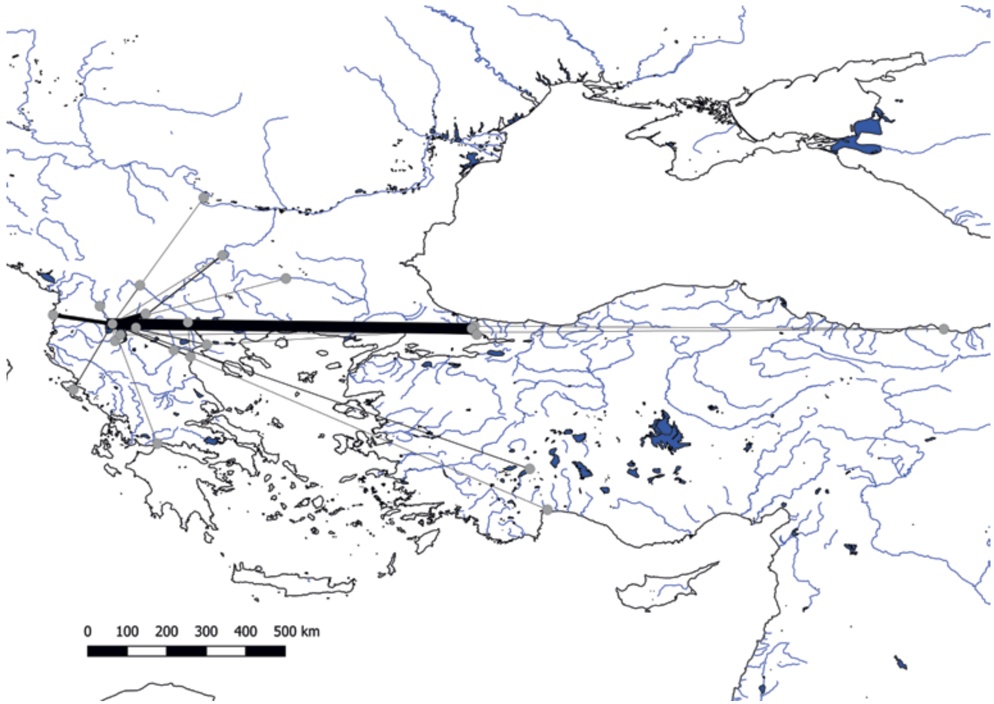

FIGURE 16.2 Network of localities connected through the letters of Theophylact of Ochrid in geographical space (links are scaled according to the number of letters exchanged between two localities)
CREATED BY J. PREISER-KAPELLER, 2013

Theophylact's letters, especially by combining network data with tools of Historical Geographical Information Systems (*HGIS*) and drawing nodes and links on a map (Fig. 16.2). Such a spatial network model provides some more information, especially on the density of connections, than a traditional map would.[46] Yet, only the visualization of such a relatively simple structure would not justify the time and effort to apply tools of network analysis, as less time-consuming tools of statistical analysis would provide similar results.

A structurally much more interesting network emerges when we extract a network of 135 letters from the 3-mode-network. Two letters are "prosopographically" connected if they are addressed to the same individual or provide information on the relations to and between the same individuals. Since

46 See the map in Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. xvi. For the application of tools of HGIS especially on the historical region of Macedonia see also Popović, *Historische Geographie*.

all letters are of course connected to Theophylact and thus would also all be linked to each other – producing a very impressive, but relatively uninteresting maximally dense network – we eliminate those connections from the network provided directly through Theophylact. Thereby, we create a network of 135 nodes (letters) and 170 links of different weight, depending on the number of individuals providing connections between two letters. As the visualization illustrates (Fig. 16.1, bottom right), this network disintegrates in several components (in total, 34) of different size, ranging from isolated nodes to cliques of three or more interconnected letters up to a very large component of 68 letters. Also this component is structured into a number of cliques, between which single letters of high "betweenness" provide connections. One such clique, for instance, consists of the letters sent to Gregory Pakourianos, at this time governor in Bulgaria (G55, G68, G80), which is connected via one letter to Adrian Komnenos (G79) and one to Gregory Kamateros (G67), in which Theophylact writes to them about Pakourianos' deeds, to the rest of the network. If we determine the most central nodes on the basis of their "betweenness" value for the entire network, of the top five letters (G127, G67, G79, G98, G96, see Table 16.3) the two most central are addressed to Gregory Kamateros, who was not only a close friend of Theophylact, but, due to his position as secretary of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos and his connections to the imperial clan, a most important intermediary to the center of power. The same is true for the addressee of the third and fourth central letters, the Grand Domestic Adrian Komnenos, whom Mullett identifies as "Theophylact's most important patron". And also the fifth central letter was written to a close and at the same time powerful and well-connected supporter, the son-in-law of the emperor, Nikephoros Bryennios.[47] The quantitative structural analysis provides substantial additional support for Mullett's qualitative analysis of Theophylact's network as well as being another tool to identify central actors within his first order zone. What is more, the entire letter collection is visualized in a new way which helps to identify underlying structures and the embedding of individual documents within clusters of letters interconnected with regard to their content. In a similar way, networks of letters within a collection can be created by mapping the connections through other aspects of content – the discussion of the same philosophical topic, for instance – or through the usage of similar

47 Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 350 (*s. v.* 4. Gregory Kamateros), p. 352 (*s. v.* 11. Nikephoros Bryennios), p. 361 (*s. v.* 41. Adrian Komnenos).

linguistic elements. Thereby, a relational perspective subsidiary to traditional approaches for the organization of the material can be established.[48]

The most common approach to network analysis as was also introduced by Mullett is the collection of relational data on individuals. In our case, this includes data on Theophylact and all individuals that can be linked directly to him on the basis of his letters ("first order zone") as well as on all connections between these individuals (forming an "ego-network" of Theophylact). From our 3-mode-network, we extract a network of 111 individuals and 236 links of different weight, depending on the number of letters exchanged between them or referring to them at the same time. The "strongest" connections from a quantitative point of view we detect between Theophylact and his brother Demetrios (16), not only his most intimate confidant, but also very well-connected at the imperial court and therefore instrumental in many ways; Theophylact and Michael Pantechnes (9), another close friend; Theophylact and John Komnenos (8), doux of Dyrrhachion and a contact person in several official matters; and Theophylact and the already-mentioned Gregory Kamateros.[49] But as Mullett was aware, the letters alone do not provide all available information on Theophylact's ego-network, so therefore she augmented her data with other sources, such as his poems, for instance.[50] If we integrate this information into the network extracted from the 3-mode-network, we create an augmented network of Theophylact with 128 individuals (which would be an average number of an individual's first order zone[51]) and 325 links (see also Table 16.1). In this ego-network, Theophylact of course is the most central node on which the entire structure is centered on (Fig. 16.3). Any structural analysis would thus provide relatively unsurprising results by identifying him as the predominant actor. Therefore, it is common to eliminate the "ego-node" from its network for the purpose of further analysis. Thereby the significance of other nodes within the structure can be detected. At the same time, the relevance of "ego" for the cohesion of the network becomes visible: is the result of its elimination total disintegration, or are there other nodes and connections which hold together the structure and are therefore especially relevant for

48 Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 19–21, 29–30 (also on the concept of a letter as "actor"), 79–133 (on the "traditional" ordering and the contents of the letters). See also Bergs, *Social Networks*, and for an interesting application on Chinese history, De Weerdt, *Information, Territory, and Networks*.

49 Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 349 (*s. v.* 1. Demetrios), p. 351 (*s. v.* 7. Michael Pantechnes), p. 361 (*s. v.* 42. John Komnenos).

50 Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 166, 368, 375–76.

51 Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, pp. 34–35.

TABLE 16.1 Extract from the matrix for the network of individuals modeled on the basis of the relational data in Theophylact's letters, with rows and columns for every individual and numbers at the intersections indicating the presence/absence resp. the strength of a link (on the basis of the number of letters exchanged between or referring to two individuals)

	Theophylact of Ochrid	**Demetrios (Hephaistos)**	**Gregory Kamateros**	**Nicholas Mermentoulos**
Theophylact of Ochrid	0.0	16.0	7.0	5.0
Demetrios (Hephaistos)	16.0	0.0	2.0	0.0
Gregory Kamateros	7.0	2.0	0.0	0.0
Nicholas Mermentoulos	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

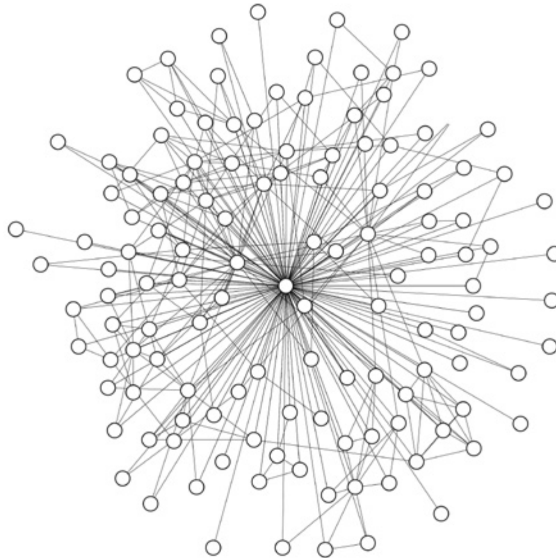

FIGURE 16.3 The "ego-network" of Metropolitan Theophylact of Ochrid on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources ("augmented network")
CREATED BY J. PREISER-KAPELLER, 2013

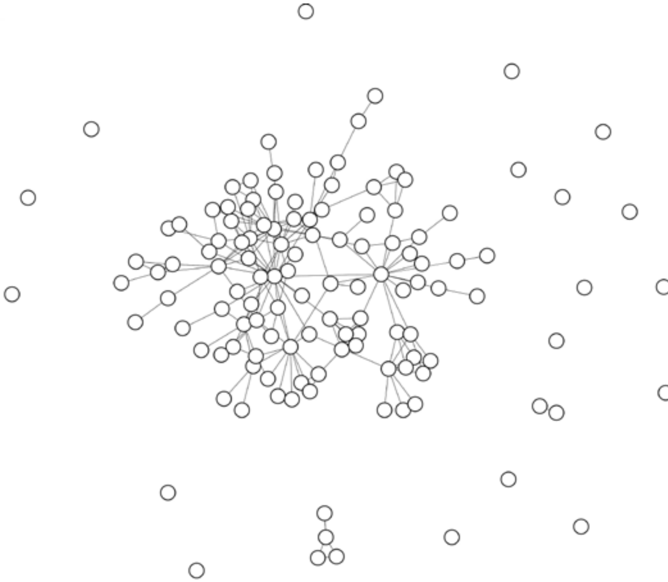

FIGURE 16.4 The "ego-network" of Metropolitan Theophylact of Ochrid on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources ("augmented network") after the node of Theophylact has been eliminated from the network
CREATED BY J. PREISER-KAPELLER, 2013

ego's social environment?[52] In our case, of course, the density of the network decreases and distances between nodes increase (average path length, diameter; see Table 16.1), while the centralization of degree and betweenness is less pronounced without the "star" Theophylact (Table 16.2). Yet, while a number of nodes and smaller clusters become isolated, a significant share of the network is still connected within one big component of 111 nodes (Fig. 16.4). We thus find Theophylact embedded in a web of also otherwise interconnected nodes, (indicated also by the still relatively high "clustering coefficient"; see Table 16.2), which do not depend solely on him as intermediary, which also allows conclusions regarding his potential to act as a "broker" and thereby to wield power.[53] Of course, a considerable number of these connections we find directed towards Emperor Alexios I Komnenos and Patriarch Nicholas III, who emerge as the most central nodes of this network within the ecclesiastical and secular elite of the late eleventh century (see Table 16.3). Other members of the imperial clan and court, such as the already-mentioned John Komnenos

52 Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 120–25.

53 Burt, *Brokerage and Closure*; de Nooy/Mrvar/Batagelj, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, pp. 150–52; Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, pp. 29–30.

TABLE 16.2 Basic key figures for the various networks

	Number of nodes	Number of links	Density	Av. degree	Av. path length[a]	Diameter[b]
Network of localities	23	29	0.114	2.52	1.89	2
Network of letters	135	170	0.037	5.04	3.71	9
Network of individuals	111	236	0.039	4.25	1.96	2
Augmented network of individuals	128	325	0.04	5.08	1.96	2
Augmented without Theophylact and isolates	111	198	0.032	3.57	3.54	7
Friendship network	43	107	0.118	4.98	1.93	2
Friendship network without Theophylact	42	23	0.027	1.10	2.42	5
Support network	43	148	0.164	6.90	1.88	2
Support network without Theophylact	42	71	0.082	3.38	2.85	6
Enmity network	19	43	0.25	4.53	1.85	2
Enmity network without Theophylact	18	8	0.05	0.88	1.40	3
Early network (1080–1095)	60	178	0.100	5.93	1.93	2
Early network without Theophylact	59	78	0.046	2.64	3.52	6
Late network (1096–1108)	61	213	0.116	6.98	1.91	2
Late network without Theophylact	60	102	0.058	3.40	2.96	7

a, b Av. path length and diameter within the largest components in networks consisting of several unconnected components

or Eirene Doukaina, another important patron of Theophylact,[54] are likewise important (Table 16.3). However, among the most central nodes we also find individuals of less high status who were of special importance to Theophylact, particularly his brother Demetrios, his friend Gregory Kamateros and another close intimate and important intermediary to the court, Nicholas Kallikles, doctor of Alexios I Komnenos.[55] Their structurally significant position does

54 Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 360 (*s. v.* 37. Eirene Doukaina).
55 Ibid., p. 349 (*s. v.* 3. Nicholas Kallikles).

TABLE 16.3 Three overall structural key figures for the various networks

	Degree centralization	**Betweenness centralization**	**Clustering coefficient**
Network of localities	0.114	0.96	0.31
Network of letters	0.073	0.11	0.67
Network of individuals	0.126	0.96	0.77
Augmented network of individuals	0.117	0.93	0.68
Augmented without Theophylact and isolates	0.089	0.49	0.37
Friendship network	0.15	0.96	0.50
Friendship network without Theophylact	0.135	0.06	0.11
Support network	0.16	0.87	0.66
Support network without Theophylact	0.138	0.29	0.20
Enmity network	0.56	0.95	0.44
Enmity network without Theophylact	0.081	0.01	0.17
Early network (1080–1095)	0.139	0.93	0.74
Early network without Theophylact	0.084	0.40	0.37
Late network (1096–1108)	0.143	0.90	0.68
Late network without Theophylact	0.119	0.26	0.35

not only depend on their direct connections, but also on their links to more central nodes such as the emperor or the patriarch, expressed, for instance, in their high "eigenvector" values (Table 16.3). Their significance as confidants and supporters of Theophylact as identified by Mullett thus becomes structurally visible, quantifiable and explainable.

Our analysis so far has aggregated all information on Theophylact's connections into one network without consideration of the character or quality of these relations as described in detail by Mullett. On the basis of her analysis, we can extract three smaller sub-networks in order to take into account the "multiplexity" of Theophylact's social connections:[56] a network of friends, a network of supporters of and people receiving support from Theophylact, and a network of "negative" relations with his opponents.[57] Due to limited space, we cannot outline the results of analysis in detail, but central aspects are summed up in Tables 16.1–4 and the visualizations of Fig. 16.5–9. Within the

56 For a similar approach, see also Schor, *Theodoret's People*, pp. 41–45, 166–70.

57 Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, pp. 56–67, for possible functions of an individual's network. See also Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 177–78.

friendship network, the central positions of Demetrios, Gregory Kamateros or Nicholas Kallikles again become visible, while the support network identifies as central the same important patrons as Mullett did, and at the same time confirms the results of the analysis of the total network with regard to the indirect "eigenvector" centrality of Demetrios, Kallikles or Kamateros (Table 16.3). But while the friendship-network very much disintegrates in the absence of Theophylact, the equally sized support network shows strong cohesion – expressed also in the higher clustering coefficient (see Table 16.2) – connected through official links of patronage and support (centered on the emperor), on which we may also possess more information than on more intimate ties of friendship (Fig. 16.5–8). In contrast, the "enmity"-network shows Theophylact in conflict with a number of individuals between which we can reconstruct connections only in a very few cases (see Fig. 16.9). Also with regard to the frequency of triad types, the "negative" enmity-network differs from the other "positive" networks, where "balanced" triads of the type "16–300" (see Fig. 16.12) are much more frequent than would be expected for a random network of the same size (see Table 16.4). The quality of relations thus correlates with the structural characteristics of the networks.

Finally, we can also deal with the abovementioned aspect of the temporal dynamics of networks. For this purpose, we extract on the basis of the dating of the letters by Mullett an "early network" (including all connections documented for the years 1080 to 1095) and a "late network" (for the years 1096 to 1108) and analyze the emerging two smaller ego-networks.[58] For both periods, Theophylact's first order zone demonstrates the same strong cohesion within the elite, centered around the emperor or the imperial clan, as did the larger network (Fig. 16.10 and 16.11). The letter collection thus also provides structural evidence for what has been called the "family business" of the "Komnenian system".[59] An identification of the most central nodes within the two networks highlights continuities, but also changes in the relative significance of individuals within the structure of Theophylact's personal web, such as the consistent relevance of his brother Demetrios, but also the emergence of new central nodes in the later period such as Eirene Doukaina or Nicholas Kallikles (Table 16.3). A division of the entire network in even shorter time-slices (depending on the accuracy of the dating of letters) could help to identify the dynamics of Theophylact's network in greater detail.

58 See also Schor, *Theodoret's People*, pp. 174–79 for a similar approach.

59 See Magdalino, *Manuel I Komnenos*, pp. 180–227. See also Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, pp. 119–34 on the famous "small world" concept, which could be connected with this phenomenon.

FIGURE 16.5 The “ego-network” of Theophylact of Ochrid spanned by ties of friendship on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources
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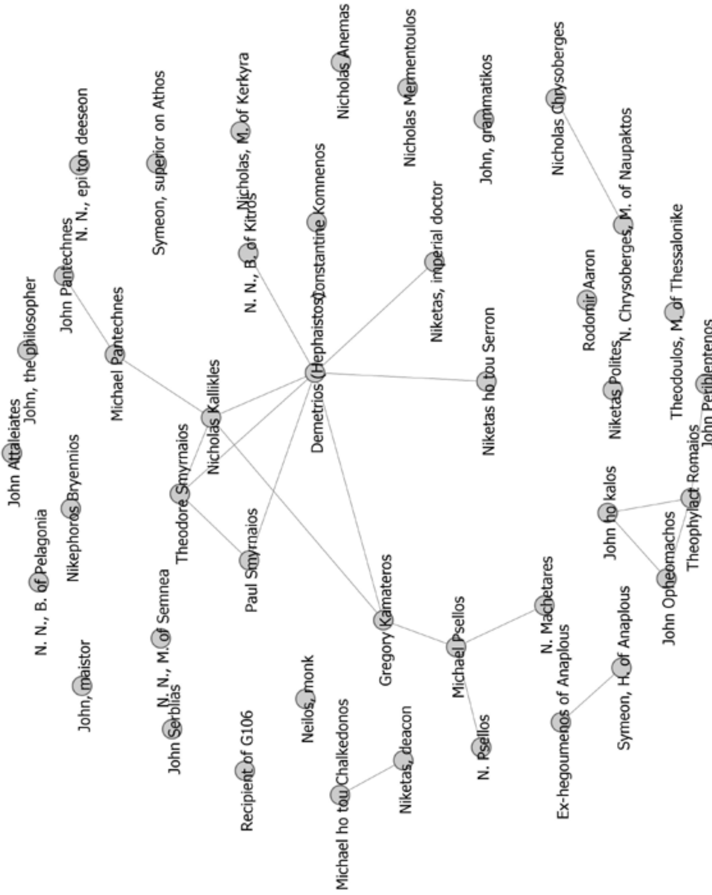

FIGURE 16.6 The "ego-network" of Theophylact of Ochrid spanned by ties of friendship on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources after the node of Theophylact has been eliminated from the network
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FIGURE 16.7 The "ego-network" of Theophylact of Ochrid spanned by ties of support on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources (black nodes: individuals supporting Theophylact; grey nodes: individuals supported by him)
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FIGURE 16.8 The "ego-network" of Theophylact of Ochrid spanned by ties of support on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources after the node of Theophylact has been eliminated from the network (nodes are scaled according to their "betweenness"-value within the modified network)
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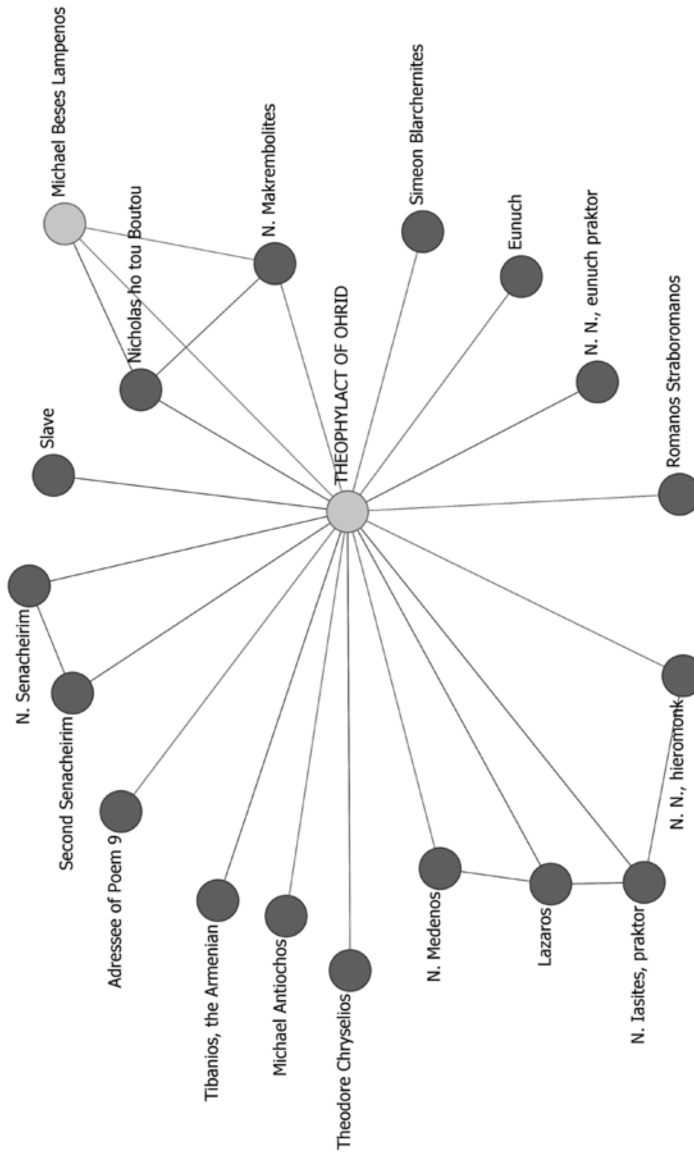

FIGURE 16.9 The "ego-network" of Theophylact of Ochrid spanned by relations of enmity on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources (black nodes: individuals in conflict with Theophylact; grey nodes: individuals supported by him)
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TABLE 16.4 Top nodes in three centrality measures for the various networks

Network	Top 5 nodes "degree"	Top 5 nodes "betweenness" (resp. all nodes which have betweenness)	Top 5 nodes "Eigenvector"
Localities	Ochrid (22), Thessalonike (4), Pelagonia (3), Constantinople (3), Prespa (3)	Ochrid (0.96), Thessalonike (0.004), Ekklesiai (0.002), Prespa (0.002)	Ochrid (0.99), Constantinople (0.86), Bulgaria? (0.68), Dyrrhachion (0.28), Pelagonia (0.098)
Letters	G127 (24), G116 (20), G28 (18), G121 (17), G113 (17)	G127 (0.11), G67 (0.10), G79 (0.08), G98 (0.06), G96 (0.05)	G127 (0.38), G116 (0.38), G93 (0.37), G111 (0.36), G113 (0.36)
Augmented network w/o Theophylact and isolates	[Emp. Alexios I (23), Patr. Nicholas III (17)], Demetrios (14), John Komnenos (11), Eirene Doukaina (11), Nicholas Kallikles (10), Michael Doukas (10)	[Emp. Alexios I (0.51), Patr. Nicholas III (0.35)], John Komnenos (0.11), Gregory Kamateros (0.10), John Taronites (0.10), John Doukas (0.09), Demetrios (0.09)	[Emp. Alexios I (0.62)], Demetrios (0.58), Nicholas Kallikles (0.44), Gregory Kamateros (0.39), Eirene Doukaina (0.31), Constantine Doukas (0.30)
Friendship network w/o Theophylact	Demetrios (8), Nicholas Kallikles (4), Gregory Kamateros (3), Theodore Smyrnaios (3), Theophylact Romaios (3)	Demetrios (0.06), Gregory Kamateros (0.04), Nicholas Kallikles (0.03), [Michael Psellos (0.03)], Michael Pantechnes (0.01)	Demetrios (0.655), Nicholas Kallikles (0.40), Gregory Kamateros (0.36), N. N., B. of Kitros (0.26), Niketas *ho tou Serron* (0.26)
Support network w/o Theophylact	[Emp. Alexios I (17)], Eirene Doukaina (9), Nicholas Kallikles (9), Demetrios (8), Gregory Kamateros (8), Michael Doukas (8)	[Emp. Alexios I (0.32)], Eirene Doukaina (0.15), John Komnenos (0.08), Michael Doukas (0.08), Nikephoros Bryennios (0.08), Niketas, deacon (0.07)	[Emp. Alexios I (0.63)], Demetrios (0.51), Nicholas Kallikles (0.49), Gregory Kamateros (0.43), Eirene Doukaina (0.40), Michael Doukas (0.37)

TABLE 16.4 Top nodes in three centrality measures for the various networks (*cont.*)

Network	**Top 5 nodes "degree"**	**Top 5 nodes "betweenness" (resp. all nodes which have betweenness)**	**Top 5 nodes "Eigenvector"**
Enmity network w/o Theophylact	Nicholas ho tou Boutou (3), Lazaros (2), N. Iasites, praktor (2), N. Makrembolites (2), N. Senacheirim (1)	N. Iasites, praktor (0.01), Lazaros (0.01)	*Not calculated*
Early network (1080–1095) w/o Theophylact	[Emp. Alexios I (13)], John Komnenos (11), N. N., B. of Triaditsa (10), Demetrios (8), Gregory Kamateros (7), John Doukas (6)	[Emp. Alexios I (0.42)], John Taronites (0.23), N. N., B. of Triaditsa (0.21), John Komnenos (0.19), Demetrios (0.12), Gregory Kamateros (0.12)	John Komnenos (0.63), [Emp. Alexios I (0.60)], Adrian Komnenos (0.42), Isaac Komnenos (0.42), Demetrios (0.34), Gregory Kamateros (0.30)
Late network (1096–1108) w/o Theophylact	[Emp. Alexios I (20)], Demetrios (14), Nicholas Kallikles (12), Eirene Doukaina (10), Michael Doukas (9), Adrian Komnenos (7)	[Emp. Alexios I (0.28)], Eirene Doukaina (0.14), Nikephoros Bryennios (0.11), [Patriarch Nicholas III (0.11)], Demetrios (0.09), Nicholas Kallikles (0.06), Michael Doukas (0.06)	Demetrios (0.61), [Emp. Alexios I (0.59)], Nicholas Kallikles (0.49), Gregory Kamateros (0.42), Constantine Doukas (0.34), Eirene Doukaina (0.32)

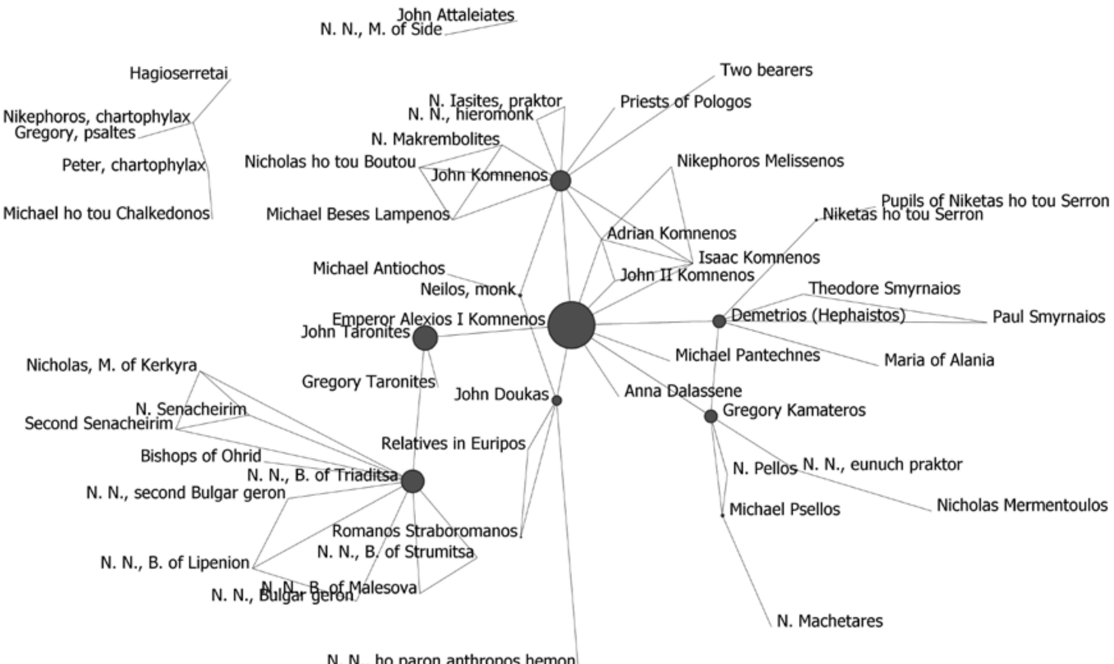

FIGURE 16.10 The "early ego-network" of Theophylact of Ochrid for the years 1080–1095 created on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources after the node of Theophylact has been eliminated from the network (nodes are scaled according to their "betweenness"-value within the network)
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FIGURE 16.11 The “late ego-network” of Theophylact of Ochrid for the years 1096–1108 created on the basis of the data from his letter collection and further sources after the node of Theophylact has been eliminated from the network (nodes are scaled according to their “betweenness”-value within the network)
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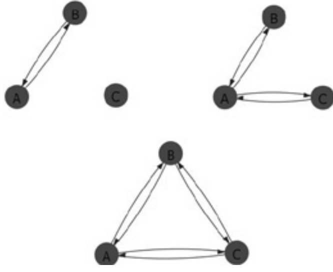

FIGURE 16.12
Three triad types frequent in the various networks: 3–102 (top left), 11–201 (top right), 16–300 (bottom)

TABLE 16.5 Triad types more frequent in the various networks than expected for a random network (see also Fig. 16.12 for depictions of these triad types)

Network	**Triad types more frequent than expected for a random network**[a]
Network of localities	**16–300** (1990.62), **11–201** (316.12)
Network of letters	**16–300** (85.34), **3–102** (4.03)
Network of individuals	**16–300** (923971.34), **11–201** (8867.65)
Augmented network of individuals	**16–300** (3291.58), **11–201** (243.51)
Augmented without Theophylact and isolates	**16–300** (5809.63), **11–201** (83.07)
Friendship network	**11–201** (11.88), **16–300** (11.35)
Friendship network without Theophylact	**16–300** (14981.70), **11–201** (150.14)
Support network	**16–300** (14.95), **11–201** (7.59)
Support network without Theophylact	**16–300** (197.76), **11–201** (13.48)
Enmity network	**11–201** (2.22), **3–102** (1.34)
Enmity network without Theophylact	**11–201** (7.52), **3–102** (5.10)
Early network (1080–1095)	**16–300** (63.23), **11–201** (20.93)
Early network without Theophylact	**16–300** (2459.02), **11–201** (47.57)
Late network (1096–1108)	**16–300** (34.64), **11–201** (12.45)
Late network without Theophylact	**16–300** (664.58), **11–201** (27.40)

a with exception of type 003 (“empty triad”)

We have now presented some of the common tools for the creation of network models and their quantitative and structural analysis, especially for the case of an ego-network based on the relational data extracted from an individual's collection of letters. Despite the obvious fragmentariness of data – highlighted, for instance, by the necessity to augment the data from the letters with further source evidence – we obtained non-trivial insights into the underlying structure of Theophylact's social web in particular, and of elite relations in the Komnenian period in general. A discussion of further results of the applied methods of analysis and a presentation of further tools, especially for further identification of groups and clusters within a network, has to be omitted. Several examples can be found in other publications by the author.[60]

4 Conclusion and Perspectives: Relations, Culture and Structure

So what can network analysis contribute to the research on Byzantine epistolography? As Margaret Mullett has demonstrated with her pioneer study, the "relational approach" and the necessity for a systematic survey of all connections documented within a letter collection allow us to reconstruct the embedding of an author into the social world of her or his time as well as the usage and the influence of such a web of relations by and on an individual, especially if combined with a detailed analysis of the linguistic means to establish, modify, express or terminate relations – even without elaborate quantitative analysis. What modern (software) tools, among other things, add are more possibilities to organize and especially visualize such data. Such visualizations alone help to identify relevant structures and can be used as heuristic tools in their own right.[61] What is more, a structural quantitative analysis allows us to confirm earlier results and hypotheses – for instance, on the causes for the ability of individuals to intermediate, or more general, on the character of the elite network of the Komnenian period – from a structural point of view. It furthermore enables us to pose new questions to our material if systematically organized on a relational basis – see above the creation of a network of letters, for instance – and finally also to provide new findings on the relevance of individuals, groups and the entirety of a social web and their dynamics.[62]

60 Preiser-Kapeller, "Complex Historical Dynamics of Crisis"; id., "Calculating the Middle Ages".

61 Krempel, *Visualisierung komplexer Strukturen*; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, pp. 83–86; Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, pp. 6–8.

62 See also Lemercier, "Formale Methoden".

At the same time, quantitative network analysis is only one aspect of the theoretical framework of relational analysis. In addition to quantitative analysis, the field of "relational sociology" has highlighted the more "qualitative" aspects of social networks with regard to their relevance for the embedding and even construction of identities and relationships.[63] In some studies, I have attempted to combine both approaches and to demonstrate how the interplay between "culture" and "structure" can be analyzed with the help of dynamic network models.[64] A qualitative categorization of network ties, as introduced above, also contributes to an explanation for the emergence and dynamics of networks. Similarities do not only facilitate the establishment of actual social relations between individuals (the concept of social "homophily"), but, as Granovetter highlighted already in 1973, people also tend to have "strong" ties – in the sense of frequency of interaction and emotional intensity – with people who are "similar" to themselves or become more "similar" to those strongly connected. Thus, qualitative characteristics should also influence the structure and density of links in a network.[65] The relational approach views nodes and their identities as well as relations and their interpretations as "mutually generative". In a meshwork of structure and culture, identities are created at the crossing points of relations and networks emerge: ties create nodes create ties.[66]

The best-known theoretician of relational sociology is Harrison C. White. For him "networks are phenomenological realities as well as measurement constructs".[67] In the last years also several collections of papers have been published with the purpose of a combination of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory and network theory. For White, and in systems theory, "persons" are constructs of communication. They only emerge in the process of communication and gain a profile by their embedding in the web of communications. Relationships include a "history" of episodes of interaction and communication, thereby also defining the horizon of expectation for further interaction and communication. For specific relationships, specific cultural terms such as "friendship" can emerge, which in turn influence the perception and expectations of a relationship.[68] Such acts of historical communication are only accessible for us through artefacts of communication, such as letters, which

63 See Fuhse/Mützel, *Relationale Soziologie*.

64 See esp. Preiser-Kapeller, *Luhmann in Byzantium* and id., "From Quantitative to Qualitative".

65 Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties". See also Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, pp. 18–21, on Granovetter's classic concept of "strong" and "weak" ties.

66 See also Hollstein/Straus, *Qualitative Netzwerkanalyse*.

67 White, *Identity and Control*; Preiser-Kapeller, "From Quantitative to Qualitative".

68 Preiser-Kapeller, *Luhmann in Byzantium*.

describe or define a specific act of interaction or communication. In terms of relational sociology, such sources convey elements of stories of relationships. The rhetoric of classical epistolography for instance provides a metaphorical, but nonetheless impressive, description of the "co-construction" of relationships and identities within networks, as Mullett has already shown. Another most elaborate analysis of rhetorical constructions of identities and relationships in pre-modern epistolography is Paul McLean's magisterial study on *The Art of the Network* in Renaissance Florence. In this book, McLean demonstrates on the basis of thousands of letters how "selves and relations are discursively constructed by patronage seekers".[69] To analyze the semantic pool for the interpretation and definition of network ties in Byzantium[70] on the basis of its epistolography by combining philology with these new concepts of sociology and (both qualitative and quantitative) relational analysis[71] would be a rewarding undertaking for the future.

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69 McLean, *The Art of the Network*, esp. pp. 1–34 and 224–29. See also Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility* for another impressive example, but without making use of formal network methods.

70 See also Schor, *Theodoret's People*, pp. 20–35 for these phenomena in his case study.

71 See Bergs, *Social Networks* for a combination of letter-based network analysis and sociolinguistics.

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CHAPTER 17

Letters and New Philology

Alexander Riehle

1 Philology

The term "philology" as we understand it today was coined in the modern era but is derived from ancient Greek φιλολογία, already attested in the classical period, although only sporadically, with the meaning "love of learning/ literature".[1] The correlative adjective φιλόλογος appears more frequently in ancient and medieval sources, usually designating a person fond of letters. Only briefly, in the Hellenistic and Imperial periods, and in specific contexts, φιλόλογος came to designate more technically the scholar, teacher or student dealing "professionally" with language and literature.[2]

This technical usage has prevailed in most languages, although the exact semantic field remains a matter of debate. Some scholars have described philology somewhat vaguely as the practice of "slow" (Roman Jakobson) or "close reading", and as such, Edward Said saw philology as the basis of humanism.[3] In a more recent and widely received article, the Indologist Sheldon Pollock defined philology more precisely as "the discipline of making sense of texts. It is not the theory of language – that's linguistics – or the theory of meaning or truth – that's philosophy – but the theory of textuality as well as the history of textualized meaning."[4]

1 See Liddell/Scott/Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1937, s.v. φιλολογία, with Alexiou, "Greek Philology", p. 56.

2 See the evidence in Liddell/Scott/Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1937, s.v. φιλόλογος II.3, particularly Phrynichos (Atticist of the second century AD), *Eclogae* 372: "Philologos: the one who loves the letters and strives after learning. Nowadays people use the word also for the expert [in the letters], though this is not correct [according to Classical usage]" (Φιλόλογος· ὁ φιλῶν λόγους καὶ σπουδάζων περὶ παιδείαν· οἱ δὲ νῦν ἐπὶ τοῦ ἐμπείρου τιθέασιν τοὔνομα, οὐκ ὀρθῶς).

3 Said, "The Return to Philology", p. 61: "That basis [for all humanistic practice] is at bottom what I have been calling philological, that is, a detailed, patient scrutiny of and a lifelong attentiveness to the words and rhetorics by which language is used by human beings who exist in history". See also Pollock, "Future Philology?", p. 935: "[We are talking here] about the survival of the very capacity of human beings to read their pasts and, indeed, their presents and thus to preserve a measure of their humanity" and ibid., p. 950: "only once we have acquired the means, through cultivation of philology, to access the textuality of the past can we proceed to dispute the value of knowing it."

4 Pollock, "Future Philology?", p. 934.

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This still rather broad understanding of philology as an academic discipline or approach to the textual record of the past and present contrasts with a more narrow definition – to which, most often, self-professed "philologists" subscribe –[5] equating philology with what we usually call "textual criticism", i.e., the branch of textual research that is concerned with the theory and practice of editing texts (cf. German *Editionsphilologie*/*Editionswissenschaft*, French *ecdotique*, Italian *ecdotica*, Spanish *ecdótica*).[6] This type of philology is traditionally viewed as fundamental research (*Grundlagenforschung*), a "hard science" that provides basic tools and data for "soft sciences" such as literary criticism. Such an understanding is problematic as it evokes notions of objectivity that stand in contrast with the more subjective interpretive engagement with texts.[7] Yet, as the following discussion will show, editorial theory and practice on the one hand and literary criticism, theory and history on the other are inseparably intertwined and belong to philology as a discipline that seeks to make sense of texts.

While in various periods from the time of the Hellenistic kingdoms throughout the Middle Ages in the realm of Greek and Latin literature there was vibrant philological activity which secured the survival and restoration of texts in an era of manuscript transmission,[8] the history of textual criticism in the modern sense takes shape with the humanist editions from the fifteenth century onward. The actual innovation of that period consisted, however, of mediality rather than editorial theory and technique: the invention of movable type printing by Johannes Gutenberg around 1450, which quickly led to a frenzy of making the Latin and Greek classics available through the new medium, enabled a significantly wider and quicker diffusion of texts as compared to the rather laborious, costly and slow circulation of manuscript copies. Yet, humanist editors followed basically the same principles as their ancient and medieval predecessors: they usually took one available manuscript, often a rather recent one, as the basis for their print edition and confined themselves to correcting apparently corrupt passages with the help of conjectures – i.e., hypothetical

5 Ziolkowski, "What is Philology".

6 See, for example, the definition of "philologie" in the French *Larousse* encyclopedia <https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/philologie/79148>: "Établissement ou étude critique de textes, par la comparaison systématique des manuscrits ou des éditions, par l'histoire."

7 See, for example, Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology*, esp. pp. 3–4: "the identification and restoration of texts from the past – that is, philology as understood in this book – establishes a distance vis-à-vis the intellectual space of hermeneutics and of interpretation as the textual practice that hermeneutics informs. [...] [P]hilology has cultivated its self-image as a patient craft whose key values are sobriety, objectivity, and rationality." See also Alexiou, "Greek Philology", pp. 54–55.

8 See Reynolds/Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, pp. 1–122; Pöhlmann, *Einführung in die Überlieferungsgeschichte*, vol. 1 and vol. 2, pp. 1–95.

emendations based on linguistic knowledge and common sense – and regularly by reverting to other codices offering variant readings. Through the reproduction and perpetuation in subsequent editions, a "vulgata", or canonized version, of the given text was created. Only a few scholars of the later fifteenth through to the early eighteenth centuries – among them Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494), Erasmus of Rotterdam (*c.*1469–1536), Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609), and Richard Bentley (1662–1742) – developed a sense of the historicity of manuscript tradition and the basic principles of transmission through manuscript copies.[9] It was only in the course of the eighteenth century that New Testament scholars and classical philologists started reflecting on relationships between manuscripts and their genealogy, and called for abandoning the vulgate version or *textus receptus* in favor of new editions based on the earliest or best manuscripts.[10] This was to be basis on which nineteenth-century scholars formulated a new editorial method, which was named after its most important proponent: Karl Lachmann (1793–1851).[11]

In his impressive editorial activity, which in addition to Latin poetry and the New Testament extended to medieval German literature, Lachmann gradually developed his genealogical view of manuscript transmission and of the possibilities of retrieving the oldest available version of a given text through such genealogies. In this he could draw on the observations and conclusions formulated by contemporary peers, most importantly Karl Gottlob Zumpt (1792–1849), Johan Nicolai Madvig (1804–1886), Friedrich Ritschl (1806–1876), and Hermann Sauppe (1809–1893). In short, these scholars contended that through the "collation", or comparison, of the available manuscripts of a given text it was possible to establish a genealogy of its tradition, which could be displayed in a *stemma codicum* – which Lachmann himself notably never attempted to do – and that through such a genealogy and with the help of specific criteria it was possible to reconstruct the origin of the entire tradition: a now-lost

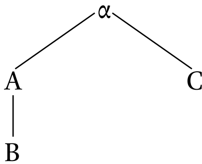
9 See Timpanaro, *La genesi*, pp. 3–16 (= *The Genesis*, pp. 43–57); Reynolds/Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, pp. 123–207; Pöhlmann, *Einführung in die Überlieferungsgeschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 97–135.

10 See Timpanaro, *La genesi*, pp. 17–34 (= *The Genesis*, pp. 58–74).

11 For the basic principles of this method see Reynolds/Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, pp. 208–42; Pöhlmann, *Einführung in die Überlieferungsgeschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 137–82. West, *Textual Criticism* remains a useful practical guide; see more recently also Macé et al., "Textual Criticism and Text Editing" (for "oriental", including Greek, literature), Tarrant, *Texts, Editors, and Readers* (for classical Latin literature), Hanna, *Editing Medieval Texts* (for Western medieval literature) and Trovato, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know* (examples mostly from Western medieval and Renaissance literature). For the historical formation and development, and Lachmann's contribution and impact see Timpanaro, *La genesi*, pp. 35–103 (= *The Genesis*, pp. 75–138) with the more recent and somewhat different perspective in Fiesoli, *La genesi del Lachmannismo*.

manuscript labeled "archetype". This process, commonly called *recensio*, was further refined, systematized and modified by philologists of the following century, namely Paul Maas (1880–1964) and Giorgio Pasquali (1885–1952).[12]

The fundamental principle of the *recensio* is that relationships between manuscripts can be established through errors, such as omissions or misreadings, they share or do not share. If, for instance, two manuscripts – let us call them A and B – have significant errors in common (so-called "conjunctive errors") that a third manuscript C does not present, and C has some errors of its own ("separative errors"), we can assume that AB and C do not directly depend upon another. That is, neither were AB copied from C, because they would otherwise share C's errors, nor, vice versa, C from AB, because it would share AB's errors, and can be classified as two different branches or sub-branches of the tradition. If, furthermore, B exhibits all of A's errors while having additional ones, then B must derive from A and can be eliminated from further consideration as it does not offer readings potentially closer to the archetype than A – this procedure is called *eliminatio codicum descriptorum*. These relationships can be visualized with the following diagram, with α being the now-lost manuscript from which A and C were independently copied:



By applying this basic principle to all the surviving manuscripts of a given text, one can establish a *stemma codicum* (genealogical tree of manuscripts) at the top of which stands the archetype, usually designated with the siglum ω, whose text can be reconstructed through the consensus of its independent sub-branches, the hyparchetypes. Assuming that the archetype did not constitute the author's autograph copy – which for ancient literature is a safe assumption, given that even the earliest surviving manuscripts are separated from the author's lifetime by several hundred years – its reconstructed text will not be free of errors. It should also be noted that even authors are not exempt from committing mistakes when writing down their own compositions. This is when the second step of "textual criticism" comes into play, the *emendatio*, i.e., a correction of obvious errors in the archetype that is not based on readings found in the manuscripts but on the modern editor's conjectures.

12 Maas, *Textkritik* (*Textual Criticism*); Pasquali, *Storia della tradizione*.

From early on there was opposition to the rather simplistic assumptions and mechanic procedures of "Lachmann's method". Already scholars of the eighteenth century realized that scribes did not always make their copies from one exemplar alone, but sometimes took readings from several manuscripts at their disposal. Thus, regularly the "vertical" transmission gets "contaminated" with variants coming from different branches of the tradition (so-called "horizontal" transmission). Such a situation usually hopelessly spoils the construction of a *stemma*. Moreover, the tradition of an ancient text frequently does not go back to a single version represented by the archetype, but there are branches that seem to be completely independent from one another, which may point to different versions already circulating in antiquity (so-called "open" tradition).

Despite these and other limitations,[13] "Lachmann's method" has asserted itself in classical philology and numerous medieval and modern philologies.[14] In the wake of post-modern theory, however, a new wave of opposition has overrun the editorial principles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The critique came specifically from medievalists and early modernists, whose philological traditions, as those of classical philology, were heavenly influenced by Lachmann. Their objections were of a much more fundamental nature than the observation that the stemmatic method cannot do justice to complex forms of transmission.[15] In 1989, the French linguist Bernard Cerquiglini published a small monograph titled *Éloge de la variante* (*In Praise of the Variant*), which prompted a plethora of rejoinders.[16] Cerquiglini's main argument is that philology of the stemmatic type is wrong because it presupposes the notion of a reliable, definitive text – a notion that according to him did not exist in pre-modern cultures up until the eighteenth century (pp. 17–29 [1–12]). He insists that, on the contrary, especially in the Middle Ages text *is* variance (esp. pp. 57–69 [33–45]) and that it is philology's and the philologists' task to display such variance in their editions (pp. 105–16 [72–82]). In this, he criticized not only "Lachmann's method", which treats every variant as error that needs to be eliminated in order to get as close as possible to a supposed original text

13 For instance, an endless discussion has revolved around the puzzling question of why almost all *stemmata* are bipartite, as in our simple example above, rather than having three or more main branches. Is this situation inherent in the nature of manuscript transmission or due to some flaw in the method of reconstruction? See, for example, Timpanaro, *La genesi*, pp. 123–50 (= *The Genesis*, pp. 157–87); Grier, "Lachmann, Bédier and the Bipartite Stemma".

14 The essays in Greetham, *Scholarly Editing* on traditions of text editing in various disciplines provide a good overview; see the name index at p. 693, s.v. Lachmann, Karl for references to "Lachmann's method" throughout the volume.

15 For a concise overview of the New Philology movement, its background and impact on Medieval Studies, see Yager, "New Philology". See also Bein, "Textkritik", pp. 90–92.

16 See, for instance, Busby, *Towards a Synthesis?*; Stackmann, "Neue Philologie?".

(pp. 73–101 [46–71]), but also Joseph Bédier (1864–1938), who, in opposition to Lachmann and his followers, had argued for editing medieval French texts or text versions on the basis of one manuscript only (today usually labelled "best-text method").[17] In his conclusion, Cerquiglini advocated the use of the then still relatively new computer technology in text editing, because "the computer, through its dialogic and multidimensional screen, simulates the endless and joyful mobility of medieval writing".[18]

Shortly after the publication of Cerquiglini's book, a special issue of the journal *Speculum*, edited by the American Romanist Stephen G. Nichols, appeared under the title "The New Philology". What was new in this philology was not a coherent conceptual framework for textual scholarship, but a general "desire to return to the medieval origins of philology, to its roots in a *manuscript* culture" and "to minimize the isolation between medieval studies and other contemporary cognitive methodologies".[19] This desire expresses itself in the New Philologist's attention to the manuscript not merely as textual witness in the tradition of an authorial work, but as a cultural product, which involves visual images, script, paratexts and other elements that stand in dynamic relationships with one another. Post-structuralist theory which called into question several pivotal notions of traditional literary criticism such as "author", evidently served as an important source of inspiration for the movement. Nichol thus characteristically states that "in the act of copying a text, the scribe supplants the original poet, often changing words or narrative order, suppressing or shortening some sections, while interpolating new material in others", concluding that "medieval culture did not simply live with diversity, it cultivated it".[20]

On a historiographical side note, it should be emphasized that Cerquiglini's and Nichol's ideas were not as unprecedented as their prominent place in medievalists' discussions about editorial scholarship may suggest, but had important precursors in philologies of mostly modern literatures.[21] In Anglo-American Studies it was particularly Jerome McGann who, in light of

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17 Bédier, "La tradition manuscrite", esp. 353–56. A related (but in several ways fundamentally different) method, which is primarily employed in Anglo-American text editing, is that of the "copy-text"; see Tanselle, "The Varieties of Scholarly Editing", pp. 21–23 for an introduction to its history and its distinction from best-text models.

18 *In Praise of the Variant*, pp. 80–81 (*Éloge de la variante*, p. 114: "l'ordinateur, par son écran dialogique et multidimensionnel, simule la mobilité incessante et joyeuse de l'écriture médiévale").

19 Nichols, "Introduction", p. 1.

20 Ibid., pp. 7–9.

21 In his introduction, Cerquiglini remarks on contemporary interest in "genetic criticism" but does not provide any references: *Éloge de la variante*, pp. 9–11 (*In Praise of the Variant*, pp. xi–xiii).

then recent trends in literary theory, took a critical stance against the heavy reliance on authorial intention in the eclectic methods of copy-text editions.[22] In German philology similar trends loomed already in the early 1970s.[23] On account of the many variants they found in authorial drafts, in multiple "final" versions and authorized publications, scholars in this field left behind the notion of a stable, definitive text and declared as the most important objective of their "historical-critical editions" (*historisch-kritische Ausgaben*) the adequate presentation of such fluidity and in particular of the genesis of texts. The collective volume *Texte und Varianten*, edited by Gunter Martens and Hans Zeller and published in 1971, was an important milestone. In his own contribution to the volume, Martens posited a dynamic understanding of "text", stating programmatically that "text in this sense proves to be no longer a static entity, but a phenomenon whose specific nature is always its immanent motion." This shift in perspective necessarily deeply affects our editorial approaches to such texts in permanent flux: "It seems obvious that this view of a quasi-infinite textual dynamic must have far-reaching ramifications for the editor of texts. Firstly, it becomes evident that with this theoretical conception of text, variance must play a pivotal role […]. Secondly, from this consideration it follows that none of the various versions of a text can claim for itself priority".[24] In order to put such considerations into practice, editors developed and implemented various types of apparatuses, such as the *Einblendungsapparat* through which variants are presented in linear succession in the running text – rather than in individual lemmata as part of a separate apparatus on the bottom of the printed page – and the synoptic apparatus, which displays variants vertically in the context of the entire text and is particularly suited for works that survive with significant textual variation.[25]

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22 McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*; id., *The Textual Condition*. See also the essays in Cohen, *Devils and Angels*, which discuss from various perspectives the intersection between critical theory and text editing.

23 Several important contributions have been translated into English and assembled in Gabler/Bornstein/Pierce, *Contemporary German Editorial Theory*; see in particular Gabler's "Introduction: Textual Criticism and Theory" for a succinct overview and comparison with the Anglo-American copy-text method.

24 Martens, "Textdynamik und Edition", pp. 169 ("Text erweist sich schon in diesem Sinn nicht mehr als ein statisches Gebilde, sondern als ein Phänomen, dessen spezifische Charakteristik schon immer die ihm immanente Bewegung ist") and 171 ("Es erscheint klar, daß diese Auffassung einer quasi unendlichen Textdynamik für den Herausgeber von Texten weitreichende Konsequenzen nach sich ziehen muß. Zunächst wird deutlich, daß unter diesem texttheoretischen Geichtspunkt der Textvarianz eine zentrale Rolle zukommen muß […]. Zum zweiten ergibt sich jedoch aus dieser Überlegung, daß unter verschiedenen Fassungen keine Textgestalt für sich eine Priorität beanspruchen kann").

25 See the surveys with examples in Scheibe, "Editorische Grundmodelle", pp. 32–44 and Plachta, *Editionswissenschaft*, pp. 99–114.

Although claims like Martens' quoted above – which are very much in line with Cerquiglini's later formulations – remain controversial, the New Philology and related trends have had a sensible impact on editorial theory and practice in Medieval Studies. This is particularly evident in the growing number of digital editions of medieval texts,[26] which enable not only the publication of much larger quantities of materials – such as transcriptions of several versions along with the edited text(s), manuscript reproductions, accompanying commentaries and glossaries, etc. – than would be possible in traditional print media but also, through hypertext method, their presentation in such a way that these materials become flexibly relatable to one another. Such editions can thus cater to the interests and needs of different groups of users, who may prefer to read the given text(s) in individual versions independently or in comparison with any given number of other versions; with the "accidentals" (spelling, punctuation) in the original form or adapted to modern-day standards; from the manuscript(s) directly, in diplomatic transcriptions, or in edited scholarly-critical or modernized versions; etc.[27] At the same time, computer tools have contributed to changes in genealogical methods of the "Lachmann" type as well, especially for texts that survive in a great number of manuscripts, such as the books of the New Testament or patristic literature.[28]

2 New Philology[29] in Byzantine Studies

As a still relatively young child of classical philology, Byzantine Studies naturally also inherited its philological methods, and it was notably a scholar very much devoted to Byzantine literature who expanded textual philology of the "Lachmann" type, namely Paul Maas.[30] Although it seems that Byzantine Studies in recent years – in a kind of pubertal act of defiance – has increasingly turned its back to the discipline that gave birth to it and seeks to be adopted into a wider community of medievalists and, for the early period, late

26 See, among others, the examples in Menzer, "Review of Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant*" and Bein, *Textkritik*, pp. 154–65, and the bibliography of digital editions of ancient, medieval and modern texts in Sahle, *Digitale Editionsformen*, vol. 3, pp. 488–508.

27 For a comprehensive introduction to digital editions and editing see Sahle, *Digitale Editionsformen*, vols. 2 and 3.

28 See, for example, Wasserman/Gurry, *A New Approach to Textual Criticism*; Macé/Schmidt/Weiler, "Le classement des manuscrits".

29 In the following, I will use the term New Philology to comprise also the related movements in Anglo-American and German philology briefly discussed in the previous section.

30 See above, p. 468 at n. 12.

antiquists, it is interesting to note that the New Philology movement has made little impact in this field, and this only recently. To my knowledge, the only explicit attempt to capitalize on the ideas formulated by Cerquiglini, Nichols and company constituted a round table convened by Staffan Wahlgren at the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Sofia 2011,[31] and the only digital critical editions in the field to date are those of the *Sharing Ancient Wisdoms* project, which include collections of sayings with a complex manuscript tradition, as well as Kekaumenos' *Advice and Anecdotes*.[32] Although these editions are perhaps not as sophisticated as some of their Western medieval counterparts, these projects haven proven the feasibility of such enterprises within Byzantine Studies and can serve as encouragement and a point of reference for future web-based editions.

One area for which the theorizations and methodologies discussed above could be particularly fruitful are texts that survive in autograph or authorized copies with significant authorial variants, which can either reflect the genesis of the given text or the revision of a "final" version for a new purpose such as performance in a different context or publication in a manuscript as part of the collected works of an author.[33] Another promising field is Byzantine vernacular literature. Curiously, however, the New Philology, which was proclaimed by specialists of medieval vernacular literatures, has had little influence on the philological engagement with texts composed in vernacular Greek. Although scholars from the 1970s onwards started publishing parallel editions of vernacular texts that survive in several different redactions,[34] there was virtually no theoretical discussion of inherent editorial and interpretive issues until the late 1990s and early 2000s. The subject received wider attention in the framework of two conferences of the *Neograeca Medii Ævi* devoted to Greek vernacular literature of the late Byzantine and Renaissance periods, convened in 1997 in Cyprus and in 1999 in Hamburg.[35] The first involved a round-table discussion

31 See the abstracts in the *Proceedings of the 22nd International Congress*, vol. 2, pp. 32–37.

32 *Apophthegmata et gnomae secundum alphabetum*, eds. Searby/Bylund/Österdahl; Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, ed. and trans. Roueché.

33 See generally Reinsch, "Bemerkungen zu byzantinischen Autorenhandschriften"; for detailed discussion of specific cases see, for example, Ševčenko, "The Author's Draft of Nicolas Cabasilas' 'Anti-Zealot' Discourse" with Kotzabassi, "Ein neues Autographon des Nikolaos Kabasilas"; Tiftixoglu, "Zur Genese der Kommentare des Theodoros Balsamon". In my unpublished MA thesis, I prepared an edition with synoptic apparatus, adapted from German models (see above, p. 472), of Michael Apostoles' *Funeral Oration for Bessarion*, which survives in two autograph copies that reveal repeated authorial revision.

34 See van Gemert, "Σκοπός, δυνατότητες και όρια", pp. 25–26 with the list of editions in n. 27.

35 An earlier conference (Cologne 1986) remained firmly within the bounds of traditional approaches; see Eideneier, *Neograeca Medii Aevi: Text und Ausgabe*.

of "editorial method: problems and solutions", during which the existence of multiple text versions and its ramifications for the practice of text editing were addressed at several points, albeit with hardly revolutionary suggestions for actual practice.[36] This preliminary discussion prompted the organization of a follow-up conference to be fully devoted to "the theory and practice of editing late Byzantine Renaissance and post-Byzantine vernacular literature".[37] The interpretive and editorial issues involved in "fluid" texts received more room in this context, and particularly Michael Jeffreys' contribution called for a radical shift in our editorial approaches to such texts that echo closely the remarks by the pioneers of the then still recent New Philology.[38] However, these tentative attempts at reconsidering editorial approaches to vernacular texts have left little traces on editorial practice, and so Hans Eideneier's 1988 edition of the early modern versions of the bacchanalian poem *Krasopateras* and Helma Winterwerb's 1992 edition of the late Byzantine satirical novella *Porikologos*, both of which included appended synopses of the various versions in a manner akin to the German synoptic editions, have remained the only efforts to go beyond either a pure best-text method or the mere juxtaposition of parallel versions.[39]

However, with no apparent connection to the New Philology, Byzantinists since the 1980s have started questioning some of the traditional editorial principles. For example, an increasing sensitivity towards certain peculiarities of manuscripts can be noticed in editions of the last few decades. While editors prior to the nineteenth century regularly followed, more or less closely, the manuscript(s) with regard to orthography and punctuation (the "accidentals" in copy-text terminology), "Lachmannists" have ever since tended to dismiss these features as irregular and misleading and have standardized spelling and accents according to the system presented in modern grammar books of

36 Agapitos/Pieres, *«Τ' ἀδόνιν κεῖνον ποὺ γλυκὰ θλιβᾶται»*, pp. 245–75. See in particular the contributions by Giorgos Danezes and Michael Jeffreys at pp. 249–51 and 258–60.

37 Eideneier/Moennig/Touphexes, *Θεωρία και πράξη των εκδόσεων*.

38 See Jeffreys, "Πολυμορφία" with his later handbook chapter "Textual Criticism". It should be noted that Jeffreys does not actually draw on the medieval-French scholars Cerquiglini and Nichols but rather on their Anglo-American modern-literature counterparts mentioned above. See also Agapitos, "Ἔκδοση καὶ ἑρμηνεία τῶν κειμένων" with his more extensive introduction to *Libistros and Rodamne* (*Redaction α*), ed. Agapitos, esp. pp. 94–108, and van Gemert, "Σκοπός, δυνατότητες και όρια".

39 *Krasopateras*, ed. Eideneier, pp. 90–124; *Porikologos*, ed. Winterwerb, pp. 274–327. In the main part of their editions, Eideneiner edited each version of the *Krasopateras* independently (where two witnesses exist for one version, he used one as his *Leithandschrift* and gave the variants of the other in the critical apparatus), while Winterwerb opted for a best-text approach within the three different groups of versions of the *Porikologos*.

classical Greek – which in the case of accentuation has its roots in Alexandrian scholarship of the second century BC – while introducing a punctuation system borrowed from modern languages, most commonly the native language of the editor.[40] In particular, editions published in the *Corpus Christianorum / Series Graeca*, and later also the *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* series, increasingly decided to reproduce the orthography – for instance, "proclitic" spelling of adverbial phrases like διατοῦτο – literally 'for-this(-reason)', 'therefore' – and, more recently and hesitantly, punctuation of the manuscripts.[41] Concomitantly, a series of case studies on historical orthography and punctuation were published, many of them demonstrating that – at least within specific periods, authors, genres or groups of manuscript – there is a logic behind the spelling and usage of punctuation marks, as well as striking coherence in these, which we should therefore not easily disregard in our critical editions.[42]

These are tiny, yet important, steps but we still have a long way to go until we arrive at a more historical and holistic appreciation of individual manuscripts and their interrelation as envisaged by New Philologists. While it is clearly necessary that we reconsider our methods of presenting texts in critical editions, the texts in which we are interested and which we publish are in the manuscripts regularly accompanied by elements that we either completely ignore in our editions or reserve for separate publication, such as marginal and interlinear paratexts (e.g., scholia, glosses, short poems),[43] diagrams[44] and images,[45] which are often closely linked to the main text of the given manuscript. It would be an intriguing avenue for future projects to explore viable ways of recreating these elements in editions so as to allow users to get a fuller picture of the multimedia realities of the underlying manuscripts.

40 Compare, for example, the edition of Theodore Hyrtakenos' *Letters* published in 1798/1800 by La Porte Du Theil on the basis of the sole surviving manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Par. gr. 1209), with the recent edition by Karpozilos/Fatouros.

41 For the respective series guidelines of the *Corpus Christianorum* and their application in recent editions, see Macé, "Rules and Guidelines", pp. 260–62.

42 For punctuation see, for example, the essays in Giannouli/Schiffer, *From Manuscripts to Books*; for accentuation see the survey in Noret, "L'accentuation Byzantine".

43 On marginal "microtexts" see generally Odorico, "'… Alia nullius momenti'". Specifically for poetic paratexts see Demoen, "La poésie de la συλλογή" with Ghent University's *Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams* <http://www.dbbe.ugent.be/> and the recent edition of selected book epigrams in illuminated manuscripts by Rhoby, *Ausgewählte byzantinische Epigramme*.

44 See the interdisciplinary 2018 Dumbarton Oaks symposium devoted to this theme: <https://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/scholarly-activities/the-diagram-paradigm>.

45 See Tsamakda, *A Companion to Byzantine Illustrated Manuscripts*.

3 New Philology and Byzantine Epistolography

Perhaps the most important contribution of the New Philology to textual scholarship is its attempt to reintegrate, at least on a theoretical level, text editing – which in recent decades has been regarded mostly as a mechanical technique, hence its gradual disappearance from Classics curricula in colleges across the globe – with the interpretation of texts. In the following I will argue that two related focal points of the New Philology – namely, textual fluidity and the "manuscript matrix"[46] – can help us re-assess important aspects of Byzantine epistolography and reconsider both our interpretive and our editorial approaches to Byzantine letter-collections. Before outlining some possibilities of such a synergy, a few remarks on the transmission of medieval Greek letters are necessary.

From most literate cultures – ancient, medieval and modern – we today possess letters that have come down to us in the form of the original piece of writing – on clay, stone, wood, lead, leather/parchment, papyrus, paper or other materials – dispatched from the sender(s) to the recipient(s).[47] Given this form of transmission, scholars treat such letters as private or official documents with a primarily historical source value. For the purpose of publication, these letters are therefore transcribed from the originals as accurately as possible – usually without the editor's intervention in the running text even in the case of obvious mistakes (so-called "diplomatic editions") – and provided with a historical commentary.[48]

The situation the Byzantinist faces is quite different.[49] Apart from a couple of thousand late antique/early Byzantine letters preserved by the dry sand of Egypt and a handful of imperial missives, no original Greek letters from the period between *c.*300 and 1453 survive. The reasons for this curious fact are simple: letters were written on materials susceptible to the humid climate that prevailed in most of the empire – parchment, papyrus, paper, wood – and the private and official archives that would have stored at least some of them perished with the end of the Byzantine Empire. So where do the more than 15,000 Byzantine letters that we can read today in scholarly editions come from? As

46 Nichols, "Introduction", *passim*.

47 See Introduction, pp. 1–2 and Ch. 1 in this volume.

48 For modern letters see, for example, Schmid, "Was ist ein Brief?"; Frühwald/Mähl/Müller-Seidel, *Probleme der Brief-Edition*; Roloff, *Wissenschaftliche Briefeditionen*; Bohnenkamp/Richter, *Brief-Edition im digitalen Zeitalter*. For an introduction to editing ancient papyri (including letters) see Schubert, "Editing a Papyrus".

49 For a more detailed discussion of the issues tackled in this paragraph see the Introduction, pp. 2–4 in this volume.

becomes evident from various contributions to this volume, ancient and medieval Greek letters were not simply a medium of pragmatic communication, that is, pieces of writing aiming exclusively or primarily to convey information over a distance or to maintain contact with loved ones. Starting in the fourth century BC, rhetors and philosophers used letters as a vehicle of learned discourse, and in the process, the letter (ἐπιστολή) emerged as a distinct literary genre with specific markers, while at the same time being cross-fertilized with other genres such as deliberative and forensic oratory.

As a consequence of this literarization of epistolography, letters were considered part of the oeuvre of their authors and therefore frequently publicized through various channels. In one of his letters, the late Byzantine intellectual Joseph Bryennios (*c.*1350–1436) provides an insightful account of the process that would normally take place from writing a letter to its wider circulation:

> For this reason, the ancients did not have this habit [to obliterate letters they had received], but did the exact opposite. When they wrote or received a letter, the senders, before handing it over to the bearer, would copy the letter into a book which also contained other writings of theirs. The recipients, on the other hand, upon receipt would show the letter immediately to other erudite men, who would memorize it and write it in their own booklets. From these men, further people would receive the letter, take it down in their turn into their books, memorize it and deliver by heart – instead of any idle talk – these useful things [expounded in the letter] at home, in public places, in the streets, in gatherings, and on the occasion of all different kinds of encounters. Thus the recipient would be admired for being friends with such a great man and the writer applauded with much praise for being a rhetorician. Moreover, in this way the power of rhetoric would be advertised and many men would strive after learning. Then something like the following would happen. When the writer decided again to send a letter to the same or another friend, well aware that the recipient would memorize, copy and tell many people about it, and that within a year the letter would be inscribed in ten or even a hundred booklets and through continuous perpetuation by learned men would last forever, imagine with how much pleasure, effort and artistry he would write the letter! This is how Libanios wrote his letters, and likewise the philosopher Synesios, Isidore of Pelousion and all the remaining writers whose letters survive. This is how much they were devoted to literature, learning, beauty, and mutual love.[50]

50 Joseph Bryennios, *Letters*, no. 2, ed. Tomadakes, pp. 125–26: Διά τοι τοῦτο οἱ παλαιοί, οὐ ταύτην ἔχοντες τὴν συνήθειαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν αὐτῆς ἐναντίαν, ὁπηνίκα ἔπεμπον γράμματα ἢ

This vivid description is indicative of learned Byzantine conceptions of letter-writing in several ways. Note, for example, that Bryennios takes for granted the close connection between epistolography and rhetoric. For the present purpose, the passages in which he comments on the public nature of private correspondence[51] are of particular interest. Bryennios suggests – as do other Byzantine letter-writers – that from the moment a letter left the sender's hands, it could possibly enter a new sphere of written and oral discourse that the author of the letter could not completely control.[52] Of course Bryennios says nothing of textual variance – on the contrary, his account suggests that the wider circle of recipients in the act of memorizing, delivering and copying tried to render the much-admired text as accurately as possible – but from all we know about oral and manuscript transmission we must assume that from this moment on, the door for deliberate or unintended variation was pushed wide open. Moreover, Bryennios' comments about "continuous perpetuation" and the canonical epistolographers of late antiquity hints at preservation, publication and transmission beyond personal, ephemeral notebooks of writers and recipients. This is corroborated not only by the evidence of the manuscripts, on which more below, but also by further references to the compilation and publication of letters in Byzantine epistolary texts. Maximos Planoudes (*c.*1255–*c.*1305), for example, mentions in a letter his plan to "publish" (*ἐκδίδωμι*, literally "give out") for a wider audience (τοῖς ἔξω = "those outside") his hitherto "unpublished" (ἀνέκδοτοι) correspondence with Alexios Philanthropenos.[53] John Tzetzes' (*c.*1110–after 1160) paratextual comment in

ἐδέχοντο, οἱ μὲν πέμποντες, πρὸ τοῦ εἰς χεῖρας αὐτὰ δοῦναι τοῦ διακομιστοῦ, ἐτίθουν γράφοντες εἰς βιβλίον, ἔχον καὶ ἄλλα τῶν συγγραμμάτων αὐτῶν, οἱ δὲ δεχόμενοι, ἅμα τῷ δέξασθαι, τοῖς λόγου μετόχοις εὐθὺς ταῦτ' ἐπεδείκνυον· καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀποστηθίζοντες πρῶτοι τοῖς ἰδίοις δελτίοις ἐνέγραφον καὶ οἱ ἐξ ἐκείνων λαμβάνοντες πάλιν εἰς τὰ ἑαυτῶν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνετίθουν βιβλία, καὶ ἀποστηθίζοντες ἐπὶ ἐπιδείξει οἴκοι τε καὶ εἰς τὰς ἀγορὰς καὶ εἰς ὁδοὺς καὶ τὰς συνελεύσεις καὶ ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁμιλίαις ἀντὶ πάσης ἀργολογίας τὰ χρήσιμα ταῦτα διήρχοντο ἀπὸ στόματος. Ὅθεν ἐθαυμάζετο μὲν ὁ δεξάμενος, ἅτε τοιούτου φίλος ἀνδρός, ἐκροτεῖτο μετὰ ἐπαίνων ὁ γράψας ὡς ῥήτωρ, ἐγνωρίζετο δὲ καὶ ἡ τῆς ῥητορικῆς δύναμις καὶ ἐζηλοῦτο πολλαχόθεν ἡ παίδευσις. Ἐξ οὗ καί τι τοιοῦτον ἐπηκολούθει· ὅταν γὰρ καὶ αὖθις ἐβουλήθη ὁ γράφων πρὸς τὸν αὐτὸν ἢ καί τινα ἄλλον ἐπιστεῖλαι τῶν φίλων, μεμνημένος ὅτι ἐκεῖνα τὰ γράμματα ὁ δεξόμενος φίλος καὶ ἀποστηθίσει καὶ μεταγράψει καὶ πολλοῖς διηγήσεται καὶ ἐντὸς ἐνιαυσίου κύκλου εἰς δέκα ἢ καὶ ἑκατὸν δέλτους ἔσται ἐγγεγραμμένα καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα μενεῖ πρὸς ἀνδρῶν φιλολόγων πολλάκις μεταγραφόμενα, μετὰ πόσης οἴει <τῆς> ἡδονῆς καὶ τῆς σπουδῆς καὶ τῆς τέχνης αὐτὰ ἔγραφεν. Οὕτω Λιβάνιος ἔγραψε τὰς ἐπιστολάς, οὕτω Συνέσιος ὁ φιλόσοφος, οὕτως ὁ Πηλουσιώτης Ἰσίδωρος, οὕτω πάντες, ὧν εἰσέτι ἐν κόσμῳ αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ διαμένουσιν. Οὕτως ἄρα περὶ τὸν λόγον ἐσπούδαζον, οὕτως ἦσαν φιλομαθεῖς, φιλόκαλοι καὶ φιλάλληλοι.

51 Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 17 aptly characterizes this phenomenon as "public intimacy". See also Chapter 11, pp. 319–23 in this volume.

52 See also Chapter 13 in this volume on the performance of letters in *theatra*.

53 Maximos Planoudes, *Letters*, no. 119, ed. Leone, p. 205, l. 5–10.

the middle of his authorial collection gives clues about his method of publication: "Second collection of some of Tzetzes' letters. For some ingenious person, who took with him the first one, lost the clean copy, while spoiling and jumbling up the draft."[54] This note suggests that Tzetzes' "draft" (σχεδία = "casual, temporary (copy)") of his collection consisted of loose sheets – hence the confusion by the person he ironically calls "ingenious" – of letter-copies – presumably the very copies he made before dispatching his letters – from which he would then, after arranging them in a certain way, produce a clean copy (ἀνακάθαρσις = "cleaning"). In another gloss Tzetzes mentions that this last step of transcription (μεταγράφειν) from draft to clean copy would normally be executed by professional scribes.[55]

Yet, authors regularly did not confine themselves to selecting and rearranging copies of their letters, but revised the very text of these letters, sometimes significantly as the case of Demetrios Kydones demonstrates. Before sending his letters, Kydones transcribed the text into loose quires, which are today preserved as codex Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 101. For the purpose of publication, he revised his transcriptions – adding or deleting single words or whole sentences, changing the wording, etc. – sometimes to a point where the new text bore little resemblance to the original letter. Kydones then passed his revised transcriptions on to a scribe – the scholar Manuel Kalekas, who is also known as a prolific letter-writer – adding marginal notes in which he instructs Kalekas on how to proceed in producing a clean copy of his collection. This copy, too, is preserved as manuscript Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urbin. gr. 133.[56] Kydones' collection is certainly the most striking and best documented example of the entire Byzantine period. There is evidence, however, that other epistolographers proceeded in similar ways.[57]

54 John Tzetzes, *Letters*, ed. Leone, p. 99, l. 1–6: Δευτέρα συναγωγή τινων τοῦ Τζέτζου ἐπιστολῶν· τὴν γὰρ προτέραν, τήν τε σχεδίαν καὶ ἀνακάθαρσιν χρηστός τις ἀφελόμενος ἄνθρωπος, τὴν μὲν ἠφάνισε παντελῶς, τὴν δὲ παρέφθειρέ τε καὶ ἀλληνάλλως συνέθετο.

55 Ibid., p. 159, l. 8–23. See, for example, also Gregory of Cyprus (*ca.*1241–1289/90), *Letters*, no. 155, ed. Eustratiades, p. 149, l. 6–8: "Having collected my letters from here and there, I have them transcribed by a calligrapher, as I wish to have them all together in one volume" (ἐπιστολὰς τὰς ἐμαυτοῦ ἄλλοθεν ἄλλην ὡς ἂν οἷός τε ὦ συλλέγων καλλιγραφεῖν δίδωμι, βουλόμενος αὐτὰς εἰς πυκτίον ἔχειν ἀθρόας).

56 See Loenertz, *Les recueils*, pp. 1–18 with Hatlie, "Life and Artistry", pp. 81–102. See also Chapter 5, pp. 168–70 in this volume.

57 See, for example, Riehle, *Funktionen der byzantinischen Epistolographie*, pp. 47–85 and id., "Epistolography as Autobiography" on Nikephoros Choumnos (*c.*1260–1327); on Emperor Manuel II Paiologos (1350–1425) see the edition and translation of his *Letters* by Dennis, pp. xxi–xxii and Tinnefeld, "Zur Entstehung von Briefsammlungen", pp. 368–69.

This process of compiling letters into collections is of course attested well before the Byzantine period in the Greco-Roman world. In Latin, this tradition begins with Cicero (106–43 BC) – who considered producing a collection of his revised letters towards the end of his life; the surviving collections were put together soon after his death by unknown compilers – while Pliny the Younger's (*c.*61–*c.*113 AD) self-edited collection in 9 or 10 books became similarly authoritative for later generations of letter-writers and compilers.[58] In Greek, the beginnings of this practice are more difficult to trace. Several letter-collections attributed to personalities of classical antiquity survive, but these are either entirely or in part inventions of writers of the Hellenistic or Imperial periods, although the authenticity of some of them continues to be a matter of debate.[59] While few of these supposedly early collections genuinely belong to their purported authors, they prove that the idea of collecting letters of men, and to a lesser degree women, of high renown such as rulers, orators and philosophers was firmly established in the Greek realm before the appearance of undoubtedly authentic authorial collections in the fourth century AD. In fact, by the late antique period the letter-collection as a literary form seems so familiar that one could well accord it the status of a genre in its own right.[60]

As in my introductory attempt to sketch out a historical understanding of the genre "letter" (ἐπιστολή), let us begin with terminology.[61] Although we do encounter words for collecting in epistolary contexts – for instance, συλλέγω ("to collect, gather") and συνάγω ("to bring together, assemble")[62] and the correlative nouns συλλογή and συναγωγή[63] – that are familiar from other types of collections such as *gnomologia* and poetic anthologies,[64] their infrequency and lack of appearance in the headings of collections suggest that these words never became generic. The typical genre name for a letter-collection is simply the plural ἐπιστολαί ("letters"). There are, however, references to other terms in

58 For a recent overview of early Latin letter-collections see Salzman, "Latin Letter Collections before Late Antiquity".

59 For a recent overview of these collections see Jones, "Greek Letter Collections before Late Antiquity".

60 See Sogno/Storin/Watts, *Late Antique Letter Collections* for an immensely useful guide to Greek and Latin letter-collections of authors of the fourth-sixth centuries. See also the essays in Neil/Allen, *Collecting Early Christian Letters*.

61 Cf. Gillett, "Communication in Late Antiquity", p. 833 on Latin terminology in late antique epistolography.

62 See, for example, above, p. 480, n. 55 the quotation from Gregory of Cyprus.

63 See, for example, Tzetzes' gloss quoted above, p. 480 at n. 54.

64 See Odorico, "Cadre d'exposition / cadre de pensée"; Demoen, "La poésie de la συλλογή", pp. 92–94.

a variety of comments on individual collections that allow interesting views into medieval Greek conceptions of letter-collections.

A selection of letters of Emperor Theodore II Laskaris (1221/22–1258) in codex Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 59.35 is prefaced by a verse prologue by Theodore's teacher and "minister" George Akropolites, who was apparently responsible for the preparation of this collection.[65] As he praises the emperor's literary skills and the beauty of his words, Akropolites refers to the letter-collection as "work composed of letters" (v. 28: ἐπιστολῶν πόνημα συντεταγμένον). The term he employs, πόνημα, literally means "something accomplished with toil" and is used in reference to any kind of literary composition. While the composite nature of this work is implied in the perfect passive participle συντεταγμένον ("put together"),[66] the result is a unified "work" in one book[67] meant to be read like other works of literature.[68]

Extensive letter-collections were regularly arranged into books (βιβλία), which probably corresponded to separate volumes.[69] In a letter to Manuel Gabalas, the later metropolitan of Ephesos Matthew, Michael Gabras (*c.*1285/86–after 1350) states that he divided his letters addressed to friends into books "lest those who want to engage with them are forced to read through the whole corpus and presently get dizzy in their minds",[70] suggesting that he expected his audience to read a series of letters in their entirety.[71]

The evidence presented above, which could easily be expanded, points to the conclusion that letter-collections were generally considered to be coherent works of literature rather than haphazard assemblages of discrete documents. In the following, I will give a preliminary outline of different types of such letter-books, discuss possible rationales that hide behind such collections and reflect on what these observations mean for our understanding of Byzantine

65 George Akropolites, *Prefatory Epigram*, eds. Heisenberg/Wirth.

66 See also vv. 12–14: "Like a multicolored view of flowers, the book encloses inside the colorful, all-radiant composition of written words" (Ὡς ποικιλόχρουν αὖθις ἀνθέων θέαν / τὸ ποικίλον σύνταγμα τῶν γεγραμμένων / πάνλαμπρον ἔνδον ἐγκαθειργνύει βίβλος). The metaphor of the meadow is a common topos in medieval collections of any kind (cf. the term anthology = "collection of flowers"); see, for example, Demoen, "La poésie de la συλλογή", pp. 94–96.

67 See the references to "this book (here)" (Ἡ βίβλος ἥδε / αὐτῆς τῆς βίβλου) in vv. 4 and 52.

68 See especially the concluding verses 53–63, in which Akropolites addresses the reader in a manner typical of epigrams.

69 For example, after his death, there was an edition of Theodore the Studite's (759–826) voluminous correspondence in five books. See Theodore the Studite, *Letters*, ed. Fatouros, vol. 1, p. 43*, n. 2.

70 Michael Gabras, *Letters*, no. 175, ed. Fatouros, vol. 2, p. 288, l. 3–6: ἅ μοι ταῦτα γράμματα τὰς πρὸς τοὺς φίλους ἔχει συνουσίας εἰς βιβλία οὑτωσὶ διελομένῳ τοῦ μὴ τοὺς ἐντυγχάνειν βουλομένους, ἀπὸ τοῦ ὅλου ἀναγκαζομένους ὁμιλεῖν, αὐτίκα ὑπομένειν ἐν τῇ γνώμῃ ἴλιγγον.

71 See also below for further discussion of this letter.

epistolography and our scholarly engagement with it, and especially the practice of editing letter-collections.[72]

A clue to one possible reason for compiling a collection of one's selected letters is found in Michael Gabras' above-mentioned letter to Manuel Gabalas. After commenting on the division of his letters into books, Gabras states with reference to the letter-collection he delivers to his addressee that

> From reading this book you will learn that I severely struggled in my life and that almost nothing panned out as I wished, so that by going through such a considerable number of letters written over a long time span you will find that I, the author, did not have good fortune in life. However, the greatest and severest of all evils that struck me you will not learn from this book, as the account of these events will be contained in the second book, which will be regarded as the first with respect to the force of calamity [displayed in it].[73]

This exceptionally explicit and detailed comment on the rationale behind compiling letters into a collection makes clear that this late Byzantine author designed his letter-books as "narratives"[74] of his life; in other words, they

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72 Cf. the methodological questions in Ysebaert, "Medieval Letters and Letter Collections", pp. 55–56 and id., "Letter Collections", p. 1900 (expanding Constable, *Letters and Letter-collections*, pp. 57–58). Cf. also the typology of late antique letter-collections proposed by Allen, "Rationales for Episcopal Letter-collections". For the formation and transmission of Byzantine letter collections see the general remarks and cases studies in Hatlie, "Life and Artistry"; Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 41–43; Tinnefeld, "Zur Entstehung von Briefsammlungen"; Papatriantaphyllou-Theodoride, "Γύρω από το θέμα της παράδοσης"; Grünbart, "Byzantinische Briefflorilegien"; id., "L'epistolografia", pp. 352–58; Papaioannou, "Fragile Literature" (for a revised version of the second part of this article see id., *Michael Psellos*, pp. 250–67); Riehle, "Epistolography as Autobiography"; Kotzabassi, "Zur Überlieferung von Briefcorpora". For late antique collections see Sogno/Storin/Watts, *Late Antique Letter Collections*; Neil/Allen, *Collecting Early Christian Letters*. For the medieval West see, in addition to Ysebaert's studies referenced above, Constable, "Letter-collections in the Middle Ages" and Chapter 3 in this volume.

73 Michael Gabras, *Letters*, no. 175, ed. Fatouros, vol. 2, pp. 288–89, lines 24–31: σὺ δὲ τἀν αὐτῇ [sc. τῇ βίβλῳ] ταῦτα ἐπιὼν ἄλλως μὲν κάμνοντα εἰς βίον με μαθήσῃ καὶ σχεδὸν τοῖς πᾶσιν εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ κατὰ γνώμην χρώμενον, ὁπότε διὰ τοσοῦδε ἥκων ἀριθμοῦ γραμμάτων χρόνῳ οὐκ ὀλίγῳ τῶν αὐτῶν ἐξειργασμένων τὸν συνθέντα με οὐδὲν μᾶλλον τύχῃ εἰς τὸν βίον ἀγαθῇ χρησάμενον εὑρήσεις. τὰ δὲ μέγιστα καὶ κυριώτατα κακῶν δήπου τῶν καταβαλλόντων οὐκ ἔσται γνῶναί σοι ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ, τὸν ταύτῃ κατάλογον μελλούσης ἔχειν τῆς δευτέρας βίβλου καὶ πρωτίστης τῆς αὐτῆς κριθησομένης τῇ τῆς συμφορᾶς δυνάμει.

74 The noun Gabras employs in this context, κατάλογος ("catalogue, list (e.g., of names)"), should likely be understood as pointing to the episodical character of an epistolary collection in contrast to continuous narration (διήγησις, ἀφήγησις).

constituted his autobiography.[75] This biographical potential of epistolography is rooted in ancient and medieval epistolary theory, which attributed to the letter the property to exhibit the character (*ethos*) of its writer[76] and thereby situated letter-writing in the rhetorical tradition of *ethopoiia* ("character-making", "speech-in-character").[77] A sequence of letters could thus be read as series of character portraits.[78] For Byzantium, an autobiographical background has been posited for the self-edited collections of John Mauropous (*c.*1000–1075)[79] and Nikephoros Choumnos (*c.*1260–1327),[80] but there are undoubtedly more.

Since letters are, however, not only representations of their writers, but representations of exchanges between senders and recipients, collections can also be read as narratives of relationships.[81] This probably explains why numerous letter-collections in the manuscripts are arranged by addressee, while others are correspondences in the strict sense, i.e., letters followed by responses. (Today many readers of letter-collections may not be aware of this, because modern editors regularly rearrange the historical collections into an assumed chronological sequence.[82]) Some collections follow this principle entirely,[83]

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75 Ancient and medieval autobiography comes in many different forms and genres (for Byzantium see Angold, "The Autobiographical Impulse"; Hinterberger, *Autobiographische Traditionen*) and does not have to follow a linear chronological pattern. See Gibson, "On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections", pp. 74–76, who draws parallels between Latin letter-collections and non-diachronic ancient biography. On reading Byzantine letter-collections as autobiographies see also Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 283–88.

76 See the Introduction, p. 9, n. 38 in this volume.

77 See Chapter 12, p. 340 at n. 30 in this volume.

78 This is one likely rationale behind the numerous "fictional" letter-collections of ancient personalities – some of which have been interpreted as epistolary novels – which flourished in the Hellenistic and Imperial periods and were widely received in Byzantium. See Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, pp. 193–252 (esp. 196–203); Malosse, "Éthopée et fiction épistolaire".

79 John Mauropous, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 28–32.

80 Riehle, "Epistolography as Autobiography".

81 See, for example, McLynn, "Gregory Nazianzen's Basil", pp. 186–91 and 193, arguing that Gregory of Nazianzos intended to present the educated public of Caesarea with a certain image of his friendship with Basil of Caesarea and to prove his superiority in theological matters through his manipulated edition of their correspondence.

82 See below, p. 491 at n. 115–16.

83 For example, the collections of Gregory of Nazianzos are in the various manuscript families all largely arranged by addressee (see the overview in Storin, "The Letter Collection of Gregory of Nazianzus", pp. 87–92), while McLynn ("Gregory Nazianzen's Basil", pp. 184–86) has argued convincingly that Gregory's original edition of his letter-exchange with Basil consisted of letters by Basil each followed by Gregory's responses. A later example for the latter type of correspondence is Theodore of Kyzikos' exchange with Emperor Constantine VII (*Letters*, B, nos. 1–18, ed. M. Tziatzi-Papagianni, pp. 83–108); an example for the former type (arrangement in groups by recipient) is Theodore II Laskaris'

while others accommodate sequences of letters addressed to or exchanged with the same person within a macrostructure that is defined by a different method of organization.[84]

While some surviving letter-collections are authorial, i.e., compiled and edited by the author of the individual letters contained in them, others are clearly the work of later generations of compilers. An early, well-documented example is the epistolary oeuvre of the ascetic Isidore of Pelousion (*c.*355–435/40).[85] The constitution of his voluminous corpus of 2000 letters was already attested by Severos of Antioch (*c.*465–538). Letters originally dispatched to specific addressees were revised – for instance, deprived of standard epistolary elements at the beginning and end, or cut into smaller pieces – and assembled, probably by monks of the author's circle, looking for and finding dogmatic and spiritual advice from an important authority in Isidore's letters. Besides this monastic redaction, multiple minor collections circulated and were used as theological source during the Christological debates of the sixth century. In addition, Isidore's plain but classicizing Greek could serve as an ideal model for the epistolary style which, according to ancient and medieval rhetorical theory, should be slightly elevated but clear, oscillating between written and oral speech. This approach to Isidore's letter-collection is echoed in later Byzantine comments that list Isidore among the canonical letter writers along with Synesios, Libanios, Gregory of Nazianzos, Basil the Great, and Michael Psellos.[86]

For most late antique epistolographers, however, we have very little or no information at all on the early history of their transmission. The first great period of codification of ancient literature in Byzantium is the tenth/eleventh century, when the oeuvres of both classical and late antique authors were published in "complete editions" in one or more volumes, while at the same

aforementioned collection in codex Plut. 59.35; see the πίναξ ("table of contents") on fol. 41r–v: <http://mss.bmlonline.it/s.aspx?Id=AWOItsgyI1A4r7GxMMQB&c=Epistolae%20diversorum#/oro/91>.

84 For example, Nikephoros Choumnos' main collections generally follow the principle of thematic clusters and chains (see Riehle, "Epistolography as Autobiography", pp. 9–11), while occasionally also bundling letters addressed to the same person (such as Emperor Andronikos II: *Letters*, nos. 10–29, ed. Boissonade, pp. 14–35) and including responses from his correspondents (*Letters*, nos. 37–39, 43–44, 133–134, ibid., pp. 45–50, 52–60, 155–59).

85 See Isidore of Pelousion, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Evieux, vol. 1, pp. 96–110 with Larsen, "The Letter Collection of Isidore of Pelusium", pp. 296–97 and Toca, "The Greek Manuscript Reception".

86 See the Introduction, p. 10 at n. 47 in this volume (Photios) and above, p. 478 at n. 50 (Joseph Bryennios).

time also producing multi-author collections in miscellaneous manuscripts.[87] Epistolography is an integral part of the newly-formed canon: the earliest manuscripts of the collected letters of Gregory of Nazianzos, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Libanios, Julian, Synesios and Isidore of Pelousion, for example, all belong to this period.[88] Moreover, there survive several epistolary miscellanies of the tenth and eleventh centuries that combine select letters of late antique authorities with those of contemporaries or near-contemporaries. Examples include the following codices: (1) Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Ambros. B 4 sup. of the tenth century, which transmits the letter-writing manuals of Pseudo-Proklos and Pseudo-Demetrios, ethopoietical and pseudo-historical collections (Aelianus, Philostratos, Theophylaktos Simokattes; Diogenes, Krates, Phalaris, etc.), as well as letters from late antiquity and Byzantium (Basil, Libanios, Firmus of Caesarea, Aineias and Prokopios of Gaza, Patriarch Photios);[89] (2) Athos, Megiste Lavra, Laur. Ω 126 of the eleventh century, combining letters of Basil, Gregory of Nazianzos and Libanios with those of more recent authors such as Photios, Symeon Magistros, Theodore of Kyzikos and Constantine VII;[90] and (3) Patmos, Monastery of St. John, Patm. 706 of the eleventh century, which likewise contains selected letters of both late antique and tenth-century writers (Isidore of Pelousion, Theodoretos of Kyrrhos, Gregory of Nyssa; Symeon Magistros, Leo of Synada, Nikephoros Ouranos, Theodore Daphnopates, among others).[91]

The incentives for such collecting and publishing activity are manifold and can only, if at all, be recovered through meticulous study of contents, compilation methods and traces of reading practice such as marginal notes as well as palaeographical and codicological analysis which may give clues to the provenance of a given manuscript. Biographical information on great figures of the past may have played a role in this context as well, but other rationales were likely more important. It is certainly no accident that the appearance of large

87 Pérez Martín, “Byzantine Books”, pp. 41–42. For middle Byzantine miscellanies in particular see Ronconi, *I manoscritti greci miscellanei*.

88 E.g., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. gr. 506 (tenth century): Basil and Gregory of Nazianzos; <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b107214756/f6.image>; Par. Coisl. 368 (eleventh century): John Chrysostom; <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10038050d/f253.item>; Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 85 (eleventh century): Libanios; <https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.85>; Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 55.6 (eleventh century): Synesios; <http://mss.bmlonline.it/s.aspx?Id=AWOItGseI1A4r7GxML55&c=Synesii%20Epistolae#/oro/7>.

89 See Martini/Bassi, *Catalogus codicum graecorum*, pp. 92–94.

90 See Darrouzès, *Épistoliers byzantins*, pp. 20–26.

91 See ibid., pp. 9–20; De Poli, “Il codice *Patmiacus 706*”. Further examples can be found in Papaioannou, “Fragile Literature”, pp. 293–94.

epistolary collections of mostly ancient authors coincides with the "golden age" of epistolary writing under the Macedonian emperors. Especially in the eleventh century Byzantine literary culture is increasingly "rhetoricized",[92] and ancient models figured prominently in this trend. Collections of letters, of both the complete-oeuvre and the multi-author types, could be employed as stylistic and rhetorical models[93] and specifically as samples for composing one's own correspondence. Evidence for this approach can be found in a variety of metaepistolary comments as well as in cases of intertextuality in Byzantine letters of the middle and late periods.[94]

Letter-collections could serve other, i.e., non-stylistic, in the broadest sense, didactic functions as well. Letters of the Church Fathers could be used as points of reference for theological debates. To give just one out of countless examples: codex Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vind. theol. gr. 168, dating from around 1350, is a miscellaneous theological manuscript.[95] Its second part, which also contains a selection of Basil's letters (fols. 270r–343r), comprises mostly texts dealing with the Holy Spirit. Some of these texts are by past theological authorities such as John of Damascus and Photios, others more recent, which pertain to the controversy between the eastern and western churches over the procession of the Holy Spirit, such as the correspondence between Pope Gregory IX and Patriarch Germanos II, and anonymous anti-Latin treatises. The selection of texts suggests that this manuscript was compiled in order to provide dogmatic material in support of the Byzantine stance on this issue. The marginal notes on Basil's letter confirm this hypothesis. Although some glosses highlight aspects of literary composition,[96] the vast majority of them are concerned with theology, and more particularly with the procession of the Spirit[97] or dogmatic matters pertinent to this issue such as the relation between

92 Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, pp. 48, 56–63.

93 A late Byzantine author of the early fourteenth century, who also prepared an edition of Libanios' letters, even used his own correspondence to teach his students Greek grammar, as evidenced by the *epimerismoi* (a form of word-by-word grammatical commentary) he appended to his collection: George Lakapenos, *Letters and Epimerisms*, ed. Lindstam. The number of surviving manuscripts points to the popularity of this collection as a teaching tool.

94 See the Introduction, pp. 10–11 at n. 46–51 in this volume.

95 For a description of the manuscript see Hunger/Kresten, *Katalog der griechischen Handschriften*, pp. 275–79.

96 E.g., f. 275r (on Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, no. 14, ed. and trans. Courtonne, vol. 1, pp. 43–44): "note the most lovely and marvelous description of the place" (σημείωσαι ἔκφρασιν τόπου πάνυ ὡραίαν καὶ θαυμαστήν).

97 E.g., f. 278v (on Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, no. 38, ed. and trans. Courtonne, vol. 1, pp. 84–85): "scholion: note the most convincing and clear statement concerning the procession

essence (οὐσία) and substance (ὑπόστασις).[98] Finally, a marginal note on the authenticity of a letter addressed to emperor Theodosios I, which is considered spurious by modern scholars as well, is of some interest in this context.[99] This remark reads: "scholion: this letter, both with regard to the thoughts and to the diction, does not seem to belong to the great Basil".[100] Notably, in the margins of this letter there are no glosses to be found, although these abound in the rest of the collection, suggesting that the reader-scribe ignored this letter because it did not carry the authority of being written by the Church Father.

Other collections were from the outset designed as unified works of religious instruction and share genre markers with other types of theological writing.[101] For example, the genre of ἐρωταποκρίσεις ("questions-and-answers") is occasionally framed as correspondence.[102] Such a work survives from the sixth century under the names of the hermits Barsanouphios and John of Gaza ("the Prophet").[103] The entire corpus comprises roughly 850 letters that follow the typical pattern of a heading introducing the question asked, followed by the letter-answer of Barsanouphios or John, and are designated in one part of the tradition as "letters and answers" (ἐπιστολαὶ καὶ ἀποκρίσεις). Although it seems that the material was drawn from letter exchanges, and perhaps also oral communications, that had actually taken place, the original collection was compiled and edited, probably by a near-contemporary, as one coherent text and furnished with a prologue addressed to "the readers of this book" (τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας ταύτῃ τῇ βίβλῳ).[104] Similarly, Photios' (*c*.820–after 893) *Amphilochia* assemble 329 responses to exegetical queries by their addressee, the metropolitan of Kyzikos, Amphilochios.[105] These were, at least in part, compiled from the written correspondence between Photios and Amphilochios, as is indicated by the considerable overlap between the *Amphilochia* and Photios'

of the Holy Spirit against the Latins" (σχόλιον: σημείωσαι περὶ τῆς ἐκπορεύσεως τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος κατὰ Λατίνων, ἀναγκαιότατον πάνυ καὶ σαφέστατον).

98 E.g., f. 313r (on Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, no. 214, ed. and trans. Courtonne, vol. 2, p. 205): περὶ οὐσίας καὶ ὑποστάσεως.

99 Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, no. 365, ed. and trans. Courtonne, vol. 3, pp. 226–27.

100 F. 331r: σχόλιον: ἡ ἐπιστολὴ αὕτη, οὔτε ἀπὸ τῶν νοημάτων, οὔτε ἀπὸ τῆς φράσεως ἔοικεν εἶναι τοῦ μεγάλου Βασιλείου.

101 See also Chapter 8, esp. pp. 234–39 in this volume.

102 On the genre in general see the essays in Volgers/Zamagni, *Erotapokriseis* and the survey by Efthymiadis, "Questions and Answers".

103 See Hevelone-Harper, "The Letter Collection of Barsanuphius and John".

104 Barsanouphios and John of Gaza, *Letters*, eds. Neyt/de Angelis-Noah, trans. Regnault, vol. 1.1, pp. 158–61.

105 See Kiapidou, "Chapters, Epistolary Essays and Epistles", pp. 57–58; Efthymiadis, "Questions and Answers", pp. 53–55.

collection of letters.[106] As in the case of Barsanouphios' and John of Gaza's collection, the *Amphilochia* are prefaced by a programmatic dedication, in which Photios comments on his compilation method, stating that "not few of [your questions] have been solved by us ourselves elsewhere",[107] and refers to the result as σύνταγμα ("composition, work, book"). Question-and-answers could also be of non-theological content. For instance, the main juridical writings of Demetrios Chomatenos, archbishop of Ohrid from 1216 to 1236, were collected – perhaps by the author himself – under the title *Various Works* (Πονήματα διάφορα). This collection comprising 152 numbered entries includes letters – their genre is revealed by a variety of epistolary markers – in which the author responded to questions from individuals on canon law. The compiler carefully arranged these letters along with texts belonging to other, judicial genres by applying formal, subject-matter and chronological criteria.[108] Closely related to this genre of ἐρωταποκρίσεις are the so-called κεφάλαια ("chapters") which provide instruction in a series of "essays". In the case of Michael Glykas' (later twelfth century) *On Difficult Passages of the Holy Scripture* (Εἰς τὰς ἀπορίας τῆς θείας γραφῆς) these were for the most part based on actual letters, which were compiled and edited to form a coherent work, as the occasional cross-reference in the text to another "chapter" demonstrates.[109]

Although this brief outline of some types of letter-collections cannot do justice to the manifold and complex realities of epistolary manuscripts, I hope it

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106 See Photios, *Letters*, eds. Westerink/Laourdas, vol. 1, pp. IX–X; *Amphilochia*, ed. Westerink, vol. 4, XVI–XXII: 80 of the letters found in Photios' epistolary collection the author also included in the *Amphilochia*. For a brief introduction to Photios' letters see Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (850–1000)*, pp. 25–30.

107 Photios, *Amphilochia*, ed. Westerink, vol. 4, p. 1, l. 5: καὶ ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς οὐκ ὀλίγα τούτων [sc. τῶν σῶν ἀπορημάτων] ἀλλαχόθι ἐπιλέλυται. This is corroborated by Westerink's observation that in addition to his letters, Photios used other works of his (including the *Bibliotheca*) as a source for the *Amphilochia*: see the reference above in n. 106. Another passage further below in the prologue suggests that some of the essays draw on oral exchanges, ibid., l. 13–16: "These very questions have been posed here and there before, and you were present and heard how our tongue removed the difficulty of some of them – for as it was possible to store what you heard in your memory, why do you demand a second time labors from us?" (τὸ δὲ σποράδην αὐτὰ προβεβλῆσθαι τὰ ἐρωτήματα καὶ τὸ ἀκοῦσαι παρόντα τῆς ἡμετέρας γλώττης ἐνίων αὐτῶν ἀφαιρουμένης τὸ ἄπορον – τί γάρ, ἐνὸν τὰ ἠκουσμένα μνήμῃ φυλάξαι, σὺ δὲ δευτέρους ἡμᾶς ἀπαιτεῖς πόνους;).

108 See Demetrios Chomatenos, *Various Works*, ed. Prinzing, pp. 62*–307*, esp. 270*–71* (on letters in the collection) and 284*–307* (on the arrangement of the collection); Kiapidou, "Chapters, Epistolary Essays and Epistles", pp. 56–57.

109 See Kiapidou, "Chapters, Epistolary Essays and Epistles" (p. 55 for examples of cross-references); ead., "On the Epistolography of Michael Glykas"; Efthymiadis, "Questions and Answers", pp. 59–60.

has achieved two related goals: (1) to present letter-collections as deliberately designed and coherent works of, e.g., autobiographical or didactic literature which could allow us to grant them the status of a genre to be distinguished from the individuals letters they contain;[110] and (2) to showcase the inherent fluidity of Byzantine letters once they entered the world of books. Due to their multifunctionality and concise form – a constituent genre marker which in practice is, however, regularly violated –[111] letters could easily be appropriated, transformed and combined with other texts, either by their original authors or by later compilers, to serve new purposes within a collection. Given this form of transmission, any attempt to restore a letter's supposed original form will almost inevitably be doomed to failure. This observation has important ramifications for our interpretive approach to Byzantine letters. Scholars today are usually interested in the original context of letters and treat them, for example, as biographical sources of their authors and addressees, as expressions of their thoughts and teachings, as documents of long-distance communication, as indicators of social networks, etc. Since the surviving letters are, however, potentially manipulated to an extent that is difficult to gauge and in a process impossible to reverse, readings of that kind will always be treading on slippery ground.

What I would like to suggest is that we abandon, at least for now, such "documentary" readings of individual letters in favor of interpretations of letter-*collections* as they survive in the manuscripts. Recent work on ancient Greek epistolography can serve as a model in that respect. While past discussions of the collections attributed to eminent personalities of classical Greece were almost obsessively dominated by attempts to determine their authenticity, scholars have more recently started to approach these collections as unified works of, e.g., narrative literature.[112] Current research on late antique

110 See Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 171–72 on transformation of genre through "aggregation": "A different process is aggregation, whereby several complete short works are grouped in an ordered collection … Such an aggregate is generically distinct both from its component parts and from unordered collections". See also Marti, "L'epistolario come genere" who, for Renaissance epistolography, distinguishes between "epistolario" (self-edited, authorial collection) and "raccolta di lettere" (modern collection/scholarly edition comprising letters of a given author). Terminology remains an unresolved issue for ancient and medieval letter-collections as well; see Riehle, "Review of Neil/Allen, *Collecting Early Christian Letters*"; id., "Epistolography as Autobiography", p. 4, n. 12.

111 See the Introduction, pp. 9–11 at n. 40, 44, 52–54 in this volume.

112 See, for example, Morrison, "Narrative and Epistolarity" whose reading of the collection of Plato's 13 letters deliberately ignores the question of whether any of them are genuine.

letter-collections is moving in similar directions.[113] This means, by extension, that we need to shift our focus to the historical collections of the manuscripts, their individual contexts and composition. Once we have a better understanding of these epistolary manuscripts in terms of their formation and function, it may be possible, at least in some cases, to get a better sense of the original form and function of the individual letters contained in these collections.

If the basic tenets of the above remarks are accepted, we will also have to reconsider our methods of editing Byzantine letters.[114] Modern editions usually treat letters as solid documents which can be restored to their original form by applying "Lachmann's method". In cases of epistolary oeuvres that survive in multiple manuscripts with textual overlap, the letters of the individual collections are most commonly fused together, re-arranged in a way that seems best to the editor – often chronologically,[115] which is problematic *per se* given that most letters elude even approximate dating[116] – and provided with an apparatus listing the readings of the most important manuscripts, with importance being determined by its place in the genealogy of transmission, as well as the editor's emendations. In this way, the collections of the manuscripts are annihilated, textual variants are buried in an apparatus at the bottom of the page and traces of reading practice such as interlinear or marginal notes are dismissed. As a result, changing uses of the individual letter-texts for different purposes – including authorial projects of shifting self-representation through edited collections – are inevitably blurred or entirely obscured.

If we want to allow readers of our critical editions to get a sense of the historical collections that are the building blocks of the edited text, then we have to do a better job presenting the realities of the manuscripts in these editions. Displaying textual variants in the narrow sense – i.e., variant readings for

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113 See Sogno/Watts, "Epistolography"; Sogno/Storin/Watts, *Late Antique Letter Collections*; Gillett, "Communication in Late Antiquity", pp. 833–40.

114 See also Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", p. 247: "while most major Byzantine letter collections have been published, in many instances questions remain about the origins and, therefore, profile of these collections. The issue is not merely how many letters are included or lost and why, but also whether letter writers or the editors of their works shaped a collection for this purpose or that, effectively distorting our image of its literary or historical value."

115 See Gibson, "On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections" and id., "Letters into Autobiography" on ancient and late antique Latin collections; for late antique Greek collections see Sogno/Storin/Watts, *Late Antique Letter Collections*, pp. 55–56 (Julian), 69–70 (Basil), 87–89 (Gregory of Nazianzos), 193 (John Chrysostom).

116 See, for example, Van Hoof, "The Letter Collection of Libanius", pp. 123–24; Kotzabassi, "Zur Überlieferung von Briefcorpora", pp. 232–34; ead., "Reconsidering the Letters of Constantine Acropolites".

single words, phrases or whole passages in the text of an individual letter – is in the case of Byzantine letters a relatively easy task, as these variants are almost always of a microstructural nature. Especially in the case of authorial variants, however, we should consider integrating the readings into the running text – for example, with the help of an *Einblendungsappparat*[117] – rather than mingling them with the editor's interventions in the critical apparatus.[118] Only in exceptional cases, such as some of the more radically revised letters of Demetrios Kydones,[119] will it become necessary to resort to a synoptic presentation of the complex process of authorial reworking.

While this kind of textual variance within single letters may at times pose methodological and practical challenges to the editor, *collections* – owing to their status as aggregates of distinct texts – present issues of their own that are much harder to solve.[120] In particular, the number and arrangement of individual letters in the manuscripts can vary greatly. What are we to do with this kind of fluidity? Is every collection, or group of collections that present no or few differences as collections, a text in its own right that deserves to be published separately? And even if we give a positive answer to this question, do we revert to a kind of "Bédierism" that obfuscates the relationship with other collections that share text with the collection we edit? Such a solution would evidently be unsatisfactory, as it would allow only for a specific kind of reading, that of the given collection as an organic unit, while precluding, for instance, an author-centered approach. Needless to say it would simply be unfeasible to provide separate print editions of every manuscript collection that contains letters of the Church Fathers or Michael Psellos, for example.

Given the multitude of different forms of transmission outlined above, it is virtually impossible to formulate a best practice for editing Byzantine letter-collection at this point. Digital editions could provide solutions to many of the issues addressed in this essay. However, there remain problems inherent

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117 See above, p. 472 at n. 25.

118 Cf. Leone's edition of Nikephoros Gregoras' *Letters*, which reproduces small-scale authorial variants in the text – vertically or with brackets indicating addition or subtraction – and in the case of two fundamentally different redactions of the same letter prints both versions separately; see vol. 1, p. 191.

119 See above, p. 480 at n. 56. In his edition of Kydones' *Letters*, Loenertz highlights instances of revision in the running text with brackets and gives the variant readings that belong to earlier text stages in the apparatus. While this works well for micro-changes, it is quite cumbersome to reconstruct from his lemmatized apparatus the repeated macrostructural revisions that occur in the text of some letters (e.g., *Letters*, no. 391, ed. Loenertz, vol. 2, pp. 342–44, especially at l. 8–9) and to understand nexuses between individual revisions.

120 Cf. Constable, *Letters and Letter-collections*, p. 65.

in the digital humanities,[121] which are even more glaring in relatively small disciplines like Byzantine Studies as these often lack the funding needed for such endeavors. Not every editor is in the fortunate position to have access to the financial and logistical resources that will allow her or him to produce digital editions, which require IT support, long-term server storage space and, where facsimiles are included, the acquisition of costly reproduction licenses. The question of whether the outcome justifies the time, effort and expenses flowing into such editions is a legitimate one than can only be answered on a case-by-case basis.

This caveat may sound sobering and discouraging. However, it would certainly be desirable to have a few exemplary digital hypertext and best-text editions of individual collections even if it may not be viable to apply these methods to the entire corpus of Byzantine epistolary literature. We have only started to understand the importance of the medium – or genre – of collection in epistolography and other kinds of writing. Now is the time to experiment with different interpretive and editorial models, and the "New Philology" can serve as a point of reference for such a paradigm shift.

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121 For digital editions in particular see, for example, Menzer, "Review of Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant*", who identifies access, information overload and maintenance as three major issues, and Macé et al., "Textual Criticism and Text Editing", pp. 346–47.

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General Index

Aba i of Kashkar 82
Abbasid caliphate/Abbasids 202, 210, 216, 219, 382; *see also* Arabs
Abelard 100–02, 115
ʿAbdishoʿ bar Brikha 69, 76, 82
Abgar 71–72, 338n14, 380
Abraham bar Qardaḥē 82–83
absence 8, 97, 154, 177, 184, 188, 280–81; *see also* separation
Achilleis 420–21
Achilles Tatius 40, 415–16
Adalbert Samaritanus 102
address 38, 59–60, 62, 64, 189, 200–01, 214–16, 220, 235, 236, 237, 242, 243, 247, 249
  external 53, 61, 210, 314–15
  forms of 18, 59–60, 126, 189, 238, 248, 296, 324–25, 342, 346, 406, 410–14
  see also salutation
administrative letter 35, 43, 97, 243, 408; *see also* official letter
Adrian Komnenos 443
Adrian of Tyre 343n42
Adrianople 213
advice 37, 45, 75, 104, 154, 162–63, 169, 178, 193, 228, 257–58, 364
  moral 98, 107, 114, 227, 234, 244
  political 3, 242–49
  spiritual 97, 99, 114, 227, 234–39, 249, 485; *see also* pastoral letter
  theological 114, 337, 485
  see also didactic letter; instruction
Aelianus 40, 486
Aeschines 36, 337n12
affection 55, 97, 229, 236, 280, 288, 292–301, 345, 435; *see also* love
Agamemnon 34
Agathias 355n12, 405–06
Aimilianos, patriarch of Antioch 130
Aineias of Gaza 41, 486
akakia 374
Albania 376n6
Alcuin 93
Alexander the Great 39, 41–42, 338, 339; *see also Alexander Romance*
Alexander ii, pope 96
Alexander and Semiramis, Tale of 421
Alexander of Nicaea 328
Alexander Romance 39n18, 412–14, 422; *see also* Venice Alexander Romance
Alexandria 43, 47, 51, 355
Alexios i Komnenos, emperor 203, 214, 219, 408, 443, 446
Alexios iii Angelos, emperor 206, 358
Alexios iii Megas Komnenos, emperor of Trebizond 383
Alexios Stoudites, patriarch 382n22
Alkiphron 40, 337, 339, 416
allusion/allusiveness 10, 18, 98, 101, 125, 141, 146, 150–51, 190–91, 407; *see also* quotation
al-Mahdī, caliph 77
al-Mamun, caliph 380–81
al-Muqtadir, caliph 243
al-Nāṣir Nāṣir al-Dīn Faraj, sultan 217
al-Qalqashandī 217
Amalric i, king of Jerusalem 407
Amasis, pharao 35
Amazons 383, 387–91, 413
ambassador *see* envoy
Ambrose 45, 52, 93
amicitia 100, 281n3, 303
Anacharsis 36, 37
Anastasios Quaestor 346n51
Anaximenes of Miletus 37
Andrew Libadenos 365
Andronikos i Komnenos, emperor 408–09
Andronikos ii Palaiologos, emperor 202, 204n16, 206n23–24, 376–77, 485n84
Andronikos iv Palaiologos, emperor 160–61, 168
Andronikos Palaiologos, Despot of Thessaloniki 247
Anna Komnene 214–15, 407–08
an-Nasir Hasan, sultan 410
Anonymous professor 181, 230, 342n37
Anonymous Sola 358
Anselm of Canterbury 97, 98, 114, 115
anthology, poetic 481, 482n66

Antigonus II 37
Antioch 141, 355
Antony IV, patriarch 247–48
Antony the Great 52
aphorism *see* proverb
Aphrahat 72–73
Aphthonios 363–64
Apollinaris (Roman soldier) 58–61
Apollonios of Tyana 37, 337n12, 338
apologetic letter 3, 38, 83, 129, 138, 237, 346
Apostolic Fathers 337; *see also* Church Fathers
Arabic
  language 68n3, 81, 83n81
  letters 3n12, 6n29, 20
  literature/sources 68n1, 210, 217, 219–20
  translation 76; *see also* translation of Greek letter
Arabs 2, 12, 68, 75–77, 81–82, 94, 212, 216, 219–20; *see also* Muslims
Aramaic
  language 68, 71, 79
  letters *see* Semitic letters
  translation 68n2
Aratus of Soli 343n42
archive 53, 71–72, 101, 113, 114, 201, 205–07, 210, 212–13, 477; *see also* transmission
arenga 211
Arethas 357n23
Aristainetos 40, 339, 416
Aristocles of Pergamon 41n24, 343n42
Aristophanes 314
Aristotle 77–79, 137, 258, 265–71, 281n2, 292, 296–97, 363–64, 413
  letters of/attributed to 7, 37, 39, 54, 260, 284
Armenia 216
Arnulf of Lisieux 105–109, 115
ars dictaminis 93, 102, 111; *see also* letter-writing manual
Artemon (editor of Aristotle's letters) 7, 54–55
Asia Minor 14, 218, 219, 302
astronomy 79, 81, 242, 261n40, 263, 265
asymmetrical relationship 153, 229, 324; *see also* inequality; patronage
Athanasios I, patriarch 202, 409, 410n37
Athanasios of Alexandria 51
Athanasius of Balad 78, 79, 81, 82
Athens 50
  Neoplatonic Academy of 12
Athos 166, 201
Atticism 142, 151, 190
audience 140, 169–70, 227, 235, 238, 313, 319–21, 323, 353–68, 405, 406, 413, 479, 482; *see also* reader
Augustine 45, 52, 72, 93, 148, 159
aurality 8–9, 20, 318, 360, 365; *see also* performance; reading
Ausonius 45
authorship 116, 342n35
autobiography 45, 113–14, 170, 262, 334, 339, 342, 346–47, 407, 483–84, 490
autograph 103, 146, 168–69, 263, 469, 474; *see also* handwriting
Aydin, *beylik* of 218

Baghdad 76, 219–20
Bardas Phokas 406
Bardas Skleros 406
Bar Hebraeus 69, 79
Barlaam of Calabria 258
Barnabas, Epistle of 49, 64
Barsanouphios 52, 488
Barsawma of Nisibis 75
Basil I, emperor 210, 378
Basil I, grand prince of Moscow 247–48
Basil of Caesarea 10, 11, 41, 52, 136, 137, 178–79, 180, 191, 261, 311n31, 317n76, 337n11–12, 343–44, 484–88, 491n115; *see also* Cappadocian Fathers; Church Fathers
bearer 1n1, 2, 6, 9, 20, 53, 111, 132, 181, 294, 300, 308–11, 314, 316, 322, 360, 362, 378–82, 384–90, 393–94, 400, 415, 478; *see also* envoy
Beirut 355
Belisarios 405
Bellerophon 34, 40
Benzo of Alba 218–19
Bernard of Clairvaux 98–101, 113–15
Bessarion 242
Bible 77, 80, 98, 101, 108, 141, 190, 232–33, 234–35, 244, 247–48, 489; *see also* exegesis; New Testament; Old Testament

biography 33–35, 38, 47–48, 337–38, 403, 484, 486
bishop *see* episcopal letter
Black Sea 41, 45, 216
blame *see* reproach
Boccaccio 112
body (of letter) 60–63, 187–89, 211, 214
Book of Ceremonies 211, 215–16, 357
book-exchange 8, 94, 150, 156, 160, 171, 182, 189, 263, 312
brevity *see* length
Brutus 10, 37, 44, 178–79
Bulgaria/Bulgars 212, 216, 242, 378, 380, 382, 440
business letter 2, 42–43, 46, 53, 60, 94–95, 96, 98, 108, 109, 114, 133

Candace, queen (*Alexander Romance*) 391, 413
canon *see* epistolary canon
canon law 80, 92, 95, 97, 337, 489
capital
  cultural 344, 368
  social 287, 290, 334
  symbolic 140
Cappadocian Fathers 4n16, 10, 127; *see also* Church Fathers
captatio benevolentiae 104, 244, 328
carmina 92n3
carrier *see* bearer
carta 200
Cato the Elder 43, 44, 45
Caucasia 212, 216
Celer 179
Cely collection 111
ceremonial/ceremony *see* ritual
chancery 200–22, 408, 421–22
chapters *see* Index of Greek Terms: κεφάλαια
character 9, 39–41, 136, 262, 268–69, 292, 337, 339–40, 363–65, 368, 404, 405–06, 484; *see also* ethos/*ethos*
Chariton of Aphrodisias 40, 404n5
Charles IV, king of France 206
charter *see* document
Chilon of Sparta 37
China 68, 71, 76, 261n38, 444n48
Chinese letters 3n11, 6n29, 20
Chion of Heraclea 36
Chorikios of Gaza 190n56
Chosroes II 406
Christ *see* Jesus Christ
Chronikon Paschale 215
Church Fathers 13, 41, 147n4, 232, 233, 235–36, 247, 337, 473, 487, 492; *see also* Cappadocian Fathers
chrysobull 374–76; *see also* Index of Greek Terms: λόγος χρυσόβουλλος
Cicero 37n11, 43–44, 53, 54, 94n12, 481
Cilicia, Armenian kingdom of 221
classical letters *see* Greek letters; Latin letters
classification 4, 33–34, 70, 200, 336–39; *see also* epistolary types
Claudius, emperor 43
Clement, Epistles of 50, 64
Cleobulos of Lindos 37
closing (of letter) 2–3, 33, 49, 189, 209, 237, 239, 405, 408, 411, 412, 415, 420, 421, 422, 485; *see also* postscript; valediction
codex 2; *see also* manuscript
collection *see* letter-collection
Coluccio Salutati 112, 147, 171
commentary
  epistolary 14, 235, 338, 344n44, 487n93
  philosophical 78n50, 255, 257, 263, 281n2
commonplace *see topos*
confidentiality 35, 53, 150, 201, 204, 212, 310–11, 359, 380
Conrad III, king of Germany 103, 215, 407
consolation 11n54, 38, 49, 51, 99, 136, 157, 187, 188, 247, 279, 281, 298–99, 343n42
  letter of 5n22, 18n89–90, 20, 44, 57, 60, 75, 98, 138, 150, 301
Constantine I, emperor 12, 338
Constantine III Leichoudes, patriarch 131
Constatine IV, emperor 211
Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, emperor 220, 244–45, 342n35, 345, 484n83, 486; *see also Book of Ceremonies*
Constantine IX Monomachos, emperor 128, 140–41, 375, 377n10, 382
Constantine X Doukas, emperor 129, 218–19, 245

Constantine Akropolites 179, 181, 182, 185, 187, 188, 189, 193, 194, 339, 347
Constantine of Harran 83
Constantine Sikeliotes 357n23
Constantinople 12, 14, 103, 131–32, 147–48, 149, 155, 157, 161–62, 164, 167, 205, 213, 217, 356–57, 363, 392, 398, 441
  Hagia Sophia 374–75
  Latin Empire of 221
conversation *see* oral communication
Coptic language 42; *see also* translation of Greek letter
copy/copying 53, 113, 127, 168–69, 180, 183, 201, 208, 209, 212–14, 221, 327, 335, 478–80
Corinth 50
Cornelia (mother of the Gracchi) 43
cover letter 150, 156, 228
Crates of Thebes 36, 486
Crete 11n54, 239
Croats/Croatia 216, 278, 382
cultural capital *see* capital
Cyprian of Carthage 51
Cyprus 78, 162, 243
  Lusignan Kingdom of 218, 221–22

Darius III 388, 412–14
date/dating 16, 61, 126, 143, 209–10, 449, 491
David bar Pawlos 82
death 135, 157, 346–47; *see also* consolation
declamation 39, 354
de-concretization 4, 142, 302, 309, 342
dedication/dedicatory letter 38, 45, 92, 100, 106, 110, 112, 169, 236, 244–47, 263n52, 489; *see also* letter-collection
definition (of letter) 1, 4, 7–8, 33–34, 137, 200, 307, 339–40; *see also* letter-collection
Demetrios (author of *Epistolary Types*) *see* Pseudo-Demetrios
Demetrios (author of *On Style*) 7n32–33, 9n38, 10n45, 11, 54–55, 70, 260n33, 284, 339–40n24, 365n52
Demetrios Chomatenos 489
Demetrios Kydones 146–71, 301–02, 342–43n39, 480, 492
Demosthenes 3, 36, 260, 333
Demotic language 42
Denmark 92
De administrando imperio 244–45
De thematibus 15n73
dialogue 7, 55, 107, 214, 233, 239, 241, 255, 260, 403
dictation 52, 317, 341, 384, 387–88, 400
didactic letter 36, 38, 43–45, 47, 49, 50, 55, 137, 138, 184, 227–52, 257–58, 265, 271, 338, 341, 487–90; *see also* advice; instruction
Digenes Akrites 417–18
Dio Chrysostom 57n80
Diogenes Laertius 37–38
Diogenes of Sinope 36, 337n12, 486
Dionysios of Alexandria 51
Dionysios the Areopagite 337
Dionysios of Corinth 50–51
Dionysios of Halicarnassus 38
diplomatic letter 20n110, 35, 50, 203–22, 251, 308, 320–21, 377–83, 399, 405–15, 422
disclosure formula 60
dispositio 211
document (imperial/legal/patriarchal) 5n22, 7, 43, 111, 200–22, 374–76, 407–09, 422
Donus, pope 211
draft 52, 53, 127, 472, 480
drama (genre) 403
  letter embedded in 34, 40
dream 346–47
Dyrrhachion 441

Easter letter 51
Edessa 68, 71–72, 75
edition (modern) 16–17, 69, 116, 125–26, 208, 255, 476n40, 477, 483, 484, 490n110, 491–93
education 38–39, 44, 57–58, 130–131, 138, 227, 230–31, 245, 246, 249, 251–52, 333n2; *see also* learning
Egeria 72
Egypt 2, 52, 68, 70, 216, 234, 431
  letters preserved in 2, 41–43, 46, 53, 58–61, 477; *see also* papyrus
Eirene (Piroska), empress 375–76n4
Eirene Choumnaina Palaiologina 4n20
Eirene Doukaina, empress 261n40, 447, 449

ekphrasis 192, 245–46, 248, 313, 415, 417
Ekthesis nea 3n11
Elia (Miaphysite bishop) 83
Elia of Qartmin 74
embedded letter 13n58, 22, 34–35, 338, 403–23; *see also* historical narrative; novel
emotion 17, 97, 131, 135–37, 154, 181, 186, 189, 283, 285, 287, 299–301, 310, 313, 314, 318, 322, 333n3, 334, 339, 347, 396, 461
encomiastic letter/encomium 11n54, 138, 150–51, 152, 158–60, 166, 169, 192, 248, 345–46
encyclical 7, 13
Enea Silvio Piccolomini 112
England 46, 96–98, 101n43, 105–07, 109–10, 111, 115
English, letters in 111
envelope 1, 315
envoy 204, 208, 378, 380, 382, 393, 413; *see also* bearer
Ephesus 47, 50
Ephrem the Syrian 72–74
epic 403, 406–08
Epicurus 3, 37–38, 44, 47, 52, 60n91, 228, 259, 264n61
epilogue, epistolary 246
epimerismoi 487n93
Epiphanios of Salamis 49n57
episcopal letter 13n61, 50–52, 75–84, 94–100, 281n3
epistola 200, 209
epistolary canon 10, 13–14, 343–44, 479, 485–86; *see also* model
epistolary motif 2, 8, 16, 18, 56, 58, 61, 64, 136, 279, 281, 311, 317, 324; *see also topos*
epistolary novel 3, 36, 484n78; *see also* novel
epistolary poem/poetry *see* verse letter
epistolary theory (ancient/medieval) 7–10, 54–58, 64–65, 70, 137–38, 177–80, 189, 191, 194, 283–85, 324, 329, 339–41, 484, 485, 487
epistolary types 7, 22, 56–58, 114, 150–51, 178, 228, 258n17, 283–85, 308
epistolographia 6n28
epistolographus 6n28
epithalamion see Vatican *Epithalamion*
equality 8, 244, 267–69, 271, 285, 297; *see also* symmetrical relationship; friendship
Erasmus of Rotterdam 112
erotapokriseis (question-and-answer) 234–35, 239, 249, 488
erotic language 345
erotic letter 3, 345n48, 416; *see also* love letter
essay *see* treatise
ethopoiia 39, 45, 47–48, 192, 215, 340–41, 343n42, 364, 404, 484, 486
ethos/*ethos* 41, 262, 338, 363–65, 484; *see also* character
Eumathios Makrembolites 347n62, 415–16, 422
Eunapios 354–55
Euripides
  letters attributed to 36, 38, 337
  letters in tragedies of 34, 40
Eusebios of Caesarea 50n59–60, 51n62, 71–72
Eustathios of Thessaloniki 127, 191–92, 313–17, 319, 320, 325
Euthymios Tornikes 358
exegesis/exegetical letter 49, 80–82, 137, 232–33, 234–35, 240, 488–89
exhortation 2, 51, 136, 158, 228, 247, 257–58
exile 22, 35, 38, 45, 132, 160, 346, 364
exordium *see* prologue

Fatimid caliphate/Fatimids 216
festal letter 47; *see also* Easter letter
fictional/fictitious letter 3, 34–41, 103, 192, 214, 219, 337–38, 341, 410, 416, 484n78
figure of speech 18, 178, 185, 192, 407
Firmus of Caesarea 486
folded/folding of letter 53, 61, 203, 315–16; *see also* rolled/rolling up of letter
forgery 48n52, 51, 99–100, 133, 214, 218–19
formula valetudinis *see* health wish
France 92, 96–102, 115
Francisco I Gattilusio 156–57
Frederick I Barbarossa, emperor 103, 210
French, letters in 111
friendship 8, 11n54, 19, 20, 55, 63, 65, 94, 97, 98–99, 101, 110, 114–15, 116, 126, 128, 130–31, 132, 134, 135–37, 154–57, 262n43,

264–72, 279–303, 324–29, 434–35, 437–38, 448–51, 461; *see also* equality; symmetrical relationship
Fronto 44
Fulbert of Chartres 94–95

Gelimer, king of the Vandals 405
Genoa/Genoese 164, 205–07, 210, 217
genre, letters as a 2–3, 5–6, 137–38, 335–36, 478; *see also* letter-collection
George Akropolites 215, 340n28, 482
George, bishop of the Arab Tribes 78, 80–82
George Gemistos (Plethon) 242
George Lakapenos 487n93
George of Martyropolis 83
George Oinaiotes 17
George Pachymeres 409
Georgia 216
Georgian language 384n30
Gerald of Wales 109–10, 115
Gerbert of Aurillac 94
German, letters in 111
Germanos II, patriarch 487
Germans/Germany 102–05, 111, 201, 210, 216, 221, 295n44, 377n10
gesture 185, 307, 312, 313, 354, 365–67
gift/gift giving 8, 19, 129–30, 136, 138, 141, 150, 155, 159, 182, 214, 228, 248, 263, 299, 308, 311–13, 323, 368, 388
gnomologion 232, 474, 481
Gortyna 50
Goths 405
grammar 82, 240–41, 487n93
Greek
  language 2, 14–15, 42, 83n81, 156, 218, 221–22, 398, 400
  translation 148, 149, 159, 163, 166; *see also* translation of Greek letter
  vernacular 7, 391–93, 408, 410, 414, 417–23, 474–75
Greek letters
  classical 3–4, 6–7, 34–37, 41, 403, 490
  Hellenistic 1–4, 6–7, 37–39, 41–43, 481, 484n78
  Imperial (Roman) 1–4, 7, 13n58, 36–43, 46–51, 57–58, 403–04, 481, 484n78
  late antique 1–2, 4n16, 10, 11n53, 12–14, 40–41, 51–52, 261, 281n3, 319, 335, 343–44, 353–57, 367, 481, 483n72, 485–86, 490–91
  post-Byzantine 14
greeting 59–64, 78, 153, 236, 335; *see also* salutation; valediction
Gregory I, pope 93
Gregory II, patriarch *see* Gregory of Cyprus
Gregory IX, pope 487
Gregory Akindynos 4n20
Gregory of Corinth 177n; *see also* Pseudo-Gregory of Corinth
Gregory of Cyprus 181–84, 189, 192, 193–94, 202, 302, 340–41, 480n55
Gregory Kamateros 443–44, 447, 449
Gregory of Nazianzus 9n44, 10, 41, 52, 54, 81, 136, 137, 178–79, 191, 193, 239, 240, 261, 333, 337, 342n39, 343–44, 345n47, 484n81, 484n83, 485–86, 491n115; *see also* Cappadocian Fathers; Church Fathers
Gregory of Nyssa 41, 52, 179, 180n15, 343–44, 486; *see also* Cappadocian Fathers; Church Fathers
Gregory Pakourianos 443
Gregory Palamas 148
grief *see* mourning
Gui of Bazoches 108–109, 113–14

Hagia Sophia *see* Constantinople
hagiography 5n22, 22, 232, 233, 334, 338, 341n33
handbook *see ars dictaminis*; letter-writing manual; military handbook
handwriting 52–53, 61, 317–18, 341–42, 347, 421; *see also* autograph
health wish 1, 2, 56, 59–60, 63
Hebrew letters *see* Semitic letters
Hebrews, Epistle to the 49, 64
Helena Kantakouzene 152, 154, 159–60, 166, 169, 265–66, 301–02
Heliodorus 40, 404n5
Heloise 100–02, 115
Henry I, king of England 98
Henry II, king of England 105–07
Henry III, emperor 377n10

Henry III, king of of England 111
Henry IV, emperor 214, 218, 408
Henry the Young King 103, 105–06
Heraclea Pontica 192
Heraclitus 36, 337n12
Herakleios, emperor 75
Herbert Losinga 115n98
Hermogenes of Tarsus 363
Herodes Atticus 41n24, 343n42
Herodotus 35
hesychasm 148, 152, 159, 165–66, 168, 230n12, 265
hierarchy *see* status
Hierotheos 17
Hildebert of Lavardin 97–98, 114, 115
Hildegard of Bingen 104–05, 114, 115
Himerios 355–56
Himmelsbrief 40, 50
Hippocrates 36, 337n12
historical narrative/historiography 249, 265, 334, 377, 399
  letter embedded in 34–35, 214–15, 219–20, 308, 334, 338, 377–83, 404–12
Homer 34, 40, 245, 358n28
homily 5n22, 232–33, 357
  letter and 72–73, 102, 237–38, 247; *see also* oration
Honorius II, pope 95, 218
Horsiese 52
Hugh Capet, king of the Franks 94
humanism/humanists 112, 147, 171, 467; *see also* Latin letters
humor 9, 20, 137, 142, 289–90, 296, 298–301, 325, 328–29; *see also* irony; playfulness
Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq 68n3
Hungary 212, 215

Ibn al-Ṭayyib 77n44
icon *see* image
Ignatios of Antioch 50, 64, 337
Ignatios the Deacon 13
illness 22, 105–06, 135, 155, 317, 346–47
image, letter as an 9, 136, 185, 188, 281, 339, 365
imitation 10, 14, 103, 127, 189–91, 229, 259–61, 333, 407; *see also* model
imperial letter 2, 7, 43, 71, 128, 140–41, 200–22, 321, 326, 367, 378–82, 399, 407, 408, 421–22
India 39, 77, 216, 413
inequality 8, 153, 268–70, 285, 296–97, 327; *see also* asymmetrical relationship; patronage
ink 52, 141, 206, 209, 210, 220, 221, 317–18, 363, 376
inscriptio/inscription 201, 314
instruction 11, 46–48, 52, 227–28, 249–51, 337, 488–89; *see also* advice; didactic letter; treatise
interception 404, 408
intercession 131–32, 287–90, 320, 326–27, 446–47; *see also* recommendation
intimacy 60–61, 63, 65, 249, 251, 285, 302, 313, 319–24, 328–29, 334, 359, 365, 444
intitulatio 211, 216, 220, 408, 410, 411
introduction *see* prologue
invocatio 220
Iphigenia 34
Iran 75
Iraq 68n3
Ireland 109
Irenaeus of Lyons 51
irony 101, 125, 129, 130, 143, 240, 299–301, 325, 328–29; *see also* humor; playfulness
Isaac I Komnenos, emperor 129–30, 138, 326
Isaac II Angelos, emperor 206, 217
Ishoʿyahb I 82
Ishoʿyahb III 75–76
Isidore I Boucheir, patriarch 149, 166
Isidore of Pelousion 10, 13, 179, 234–35, 337n12, 478, 485–86
Islam 12, 20, 76, 80, 219; *see also* Muslims
Isocrates 3, 36
Italians/Italy 147, 149n11, 154, 155, 161, 162, 171, 205, 207, 213, 216, 217, 221
Ivo of Chartres 97, 115

Jacob of Edessa 78–82
Jacob of Sarugh 74–75
Jacob bar Shakko 70, 71n12
James II, king of Aragon 206
James, Epistle of 48
James the Monk 10–11
Jerome 45, 52, 93
Jerusalem 47, 48, 75, 413

king of 215
patriarch of 100
Jesus Christ 49, 62–63, 65, 71–72, 211, 216, 237, 303n67, 338, 375, 376, 380
Jews 43, 46, 47, 69, 73, 80, 238; *see also* Judaism
John, apostle 49, 64
John I Tzimiskes, emperor 406
John II Komnenos, emperor 205–06, 375n4
John V Palaiologos, emperor 147–49, 152, 156–61, 165, 167
John VI Kantakouzenos, emperor 147–48, 152, 154, 158–59, 169, 409–11
John VII Palaiologos, emperor 168
John VIII Palaiologos, emperor 213, 246–47, 248–49
John VIII Xiphilinos, patriarch 131, 136, 294–95
John XXI, pope 206
John XXII, pope 204n16
John Apokaukos 298n52, 345n47
John Chortasmenos 3, 11n54, 192n68, 232
John Chrysostom 239, 337n12, 343, 486, 491n115; *see also* Church Fathers
John of Damascus 83, 235–36, 487
John Doukas, *caesar* 127, 129, 130, 140, 327
John Doxapatres 340
John of Gaza 52, 488
John Kinnamos 215, 407
John Komnenos, *doux* of Dyrrhachion 444
John Mauropous 127, 128, 131, 134, 186–87, 191, 194, 239–41, 250, 262, 294–95, 309–10, 311, 317, 323, 328, 342, 358n28, 362, 363, 364, 484
John of Mount Latros 298–99n54
John of Salisbury 101n43, 105, 114, 115
John Sikeliotes 190n56, 262n42, 363–64
John Skylitzes 378n11; *see also* Madrid Skylitzes
John the Stylite of Litarb 78, 80, 81–82
John Tzetzes 286–87, 323, 325, 344, 479–80
Joseph Bringas 406
Joseph Bryennios 179–80, 239, 478–79
Joseph Rhakendytes 10, 127, 177n1, 232
Jubilees, Book of 80
Judaism 47, 49, 73, 413; *see also* Jews
Jude, Epistle of 48, 64
Julian, emperor 4n16, 10, 41, 337n12, 343–44, 347, 486, 491n115
Julius Caesar 44, 45
Julius Victor 54
Justinian I, emperor 12, 405

Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe 421–22
Kekaumenos 232, 474
Khazaria 216
Khosrow *see* Chosroes
Kilij Arslan I, sultan 408
Kilij Arslan II, sultan 407
kinship 59, 135, 216, 243, 279, 282, 287, 297, 324, 388, 435
kodikellos 203, 209–10
Krasopateras 475
Kyritzes (student of Michael Psellos) 127

lament 44, 101, 192, 392, 398; *see also* mourning
Lanfranc 96–97, 115
late antique letters *see* Greek letters; Latin letters
Latin language 14–15, 42, 51, 148, 151, 205, 207, 209, 217, 218, 222
Latin letters
classical 37n11, 43–46, 48, 57–58, 61, 93, 343, 481, 484n75
late antique 43–45, 48, 52, 93, 281n3, 481n60–61, 483n72, 484n75, 490–91
medieval 3n11, 20, 92–117, 264n61, 296n45, 303, 328n150, 483n72
of the Renaissance 93, 112, 490n110
Latins (Western Europeans) 148, 159–60, 161, 163–66, 171, 205, 238, 239, 487–88
Latin translation *see* translation of Greek letter
Lazi 405
lead (as writing support) 7, 41, 52
learning 138–42, 146, 159, 170–71, 230, 245, 263–64, 271, 308, 319, 323–24, 333–34, 335, 344, 357–58, 365; *see also* education
legimus 209
length 9, 11, 98, 108, 137, 151, 178, 179, 193–95, 227, 234, 240, 249, 310, 312, 316, 325, 328, 362, 409, 490
Leo VI, emperor 231, 357, 378
Leo Choirosphaktes 339, 346
Leo the Deacon 406

Leo of Harran 83
Leo the Philosopher 357n23, 380n19
Leo of Synada 191, 280, 310, 315, 327–28, 486
Lesbos 156
letter-collection 2–3, 13–14, 35–37, 74, 76, 82–83, 84, 93–117, 127–28, 158, 168–70, 182–84, 213, 234, 239, 242, 262–63, 308, 333n2, 334–35, 337n11, 342, 343n42, 346n51, 436, 443–44, 477–93
  as a genre 107, 110, 113–17, 481–82, 488–90, 493
  definition of 114
  preface to 92, 105–106, 107, 109, 113, 115, 239–40, 340n28, 482, 488–89; *see also* dedication/dedicatory letter
  terminology of 481–82
  see also publication
Letter of Mara bar Serapion 72
letter-writing manual 7–8, 21, 56–57, 70, 105, 150–51, 177–78, 228, 283–85, 341, 486; *see also ars dictaminis*
letter written on someone else's behalf 94, 99, 104, 105, 114, 116, 128, 140–41, 192, 287n20, 321
Libanios 3, 4n16, 10, 13, 41, 127, 178–79, 180, 192n68, 193, 261, 337n12, 343–44, 345n48, 353n1, 354, 355n11, 356n19, 359–60, 366, 478, 485–86, 487n93; *see also* Pseudo-Libanios
Libistros and Rhodamne 313, 418–21, 423
literacy 110–11, 230, 334
litterae 200–01
Lothar III, emperor 103
love 97, 194, 434–35; *see also* affection
love letter 34, 101–103, 308, 337, 339, 415–23; *see also* erotic letter
Lucian 40
Lucius Bellenus Gemellus 53
Lupus of Ferrierès 93
Lycurgus 343n42
Lyon, Council of 208

Madrid Skylitzes 314, 376–83, 399–400
Magnesia 50
Mamluk sultanate 217
Manicheans 69
manual *see ars dictaminis*; letter-writing manual
Manuel I Komnenos, emperor 205–06, 210, 323, 407, 408
Manuel II Palaiologos, emperor 153–54, 160, 162–63, 167–68, 169, 202, 217, 246–47, 302, 353n3, 367–68, 480n57
Manuel Gabalas *see* Matthew of Ephesus
Manuel Kalekas 169–70, 480
Manuel Moschopoulos 337n12
manuscript
  illustrated 14, 308, 314, 376–400, 476
  marginal notes in 476, 480, 486, 487–88, 491
  miscellaneous 14, 137, 486, 487
  see also codex; letter-collection; Index of Manuscripts
mappa 374
Marcus Aurelius 179
Mark Eugenikos 248–49
Marsilio Ficino 112
Martial 45, 98
Mary *see* Virgin
mathematics 82, 94, 261n40, 263
Matthew of Ephesus 183–84
Maurice, emperor 231, 406
maxim *see* proverb
Maximos Homologetes 13, 337n11
Maximos Planoudes 185–86n36, 189n50, 189n52, 191n59, 194, 344, 363–64, 479
mediation *see* intercession
medieval letters *see* English; French; German; Latin letters
Meḥmed II, sultan 213
melete see declamation
Menander Rhetor 11n54
menologema 209, 210
Menteshe, *beylik* of 218
Mesopotamia 75, 219
messenger *see* bearer
metaphor 125, 131, 136, 139, 141, 185, 190, 289, 291, 308, 317, 345, 365, 482n66
Michael I Keroularios, patriarch 129–30
Michael III, emperor 378n12
Michael IV, emperor 378–79
Michael VII Doukas, emperor 127n25, 129
Michael VIII Palaiologos, emperor 206, 208–09, 217
Michael Apostoles 11n54
Michael Attaleiates 407

Michael Choniates 187, 190, 291–93, 313–16, 327–28, 344, 345n46, 347
Michael Gabras 482–83
Michael Glykas 237, 489
Michael Italikos 261, 263, 293–94, 300–01, 311, 319, 323, 346n50, 360–61
Michael Psellos 10, 125–43, 179, 184–85, 187–88, 239, 245–46, 258, 261, 263, 287–90, 292, 296, 299–300, 310, 312, 318, 320–22, 326–28, 333, 335–36, 344, 347, 361–66, 407, 485, 492
Michael the Syrian 78n48
military handbook 231
mimesis *see* imitation
Mistra 377
model 10, 14, 61–62, 70, 125, 127, 137, 177–79, 183, 190, 260–61, 333, 339, 343–44, 485, 487; *see also* epistolary canon; imitation; sample letter
monastic letter 52, 92, 98–105, 234–35, 247, 303n67, 485
Monembasia 376n6
monody *see* lament
Moravia 216
motif *see* epistolary motif
mourning 135, 157, 187–88, 301, 347; *see also* lament
Murād II, sultan 206, 213
Muslims 14, 77, 79, 80–82, 217–19, 222, 238; *see also* Islam
Musonius Rufus 38
mythology 45, 141, 190, 193

narratio 211
Neilos Kabasilas 149, 166, 410
network 19, 115–16, 129–31, 135–36, 151–54, 311, 322–28, 431–62, 490
New Testament 46–50, 61–65, 239, 240, 337, 343, 473; *see also* Bible
Nicaea 418n73
Nicholas I Mystikos, patriarch 202, 243–44, 250, 310, 315
Nicholas III Grammatikos, patriarch 446
Nicholas III, pope 206
Nicholas of Clairvaux 99–100, 101, 103, 113–15
Nicholas Kallikles 447, 449
Nicias (Athenian general) 35, 403n1
Nicomedia 50
Nikephoros II Phokas, emperor 406
Nikephoros III Botaneiates, emperor 129
Nikephoros Bryennios 319, 361–62, 443
Nikephoros Choumnos 179, 188, 192, 194–95, 262, 342–43n39, 362–63, 365–67, 480n57, 484, 485n84
Nikephoros Gregoras 192, 194, 258n17, 259n28, 263, 265–71, 296–97, 359n29, 365, 410–12, 492n118
Nikephoros Ouranos 316–17, 486
Niketas Choniates 408–09
Niketas Eugenianos 416–17, 419, 420, 422
Niketas Magistros 344
Normans *see* Sicily
North Africa 14, 346
notitia 200
novel, letter embedded in 3, 14, 34, 40, 308, 383–91, 403–04, 413–23; *see also* embedded letter; epistolary novel

Odysseus 40
official letter 2, 4, 7, 35, 43, 44, 46, 50, 55n75, 60, 61, 71, 108, 152, 200–22, 243, 382, 403–05, 407–09, 411, 413, 415, 421–22; *see also* administrative letter; diplomatic letter; imperial letter
Ohrid 441
Old Testament 49, 68n1, 77, 240; *see also* Bible
Olympias (mother of Alexander the Great) 386–87, 391, 413–14
Olympos, Mount (Bithynia) 128–29, 142
opening (of letter) 2–3, 11, 33, 49, 237, 239, 324, 405, 408, 413–15, 485; *see also* prescript; prologue; salutation
oral communication
(oral message) 1, 6, 9, 204, 308–11, 413–14
(face-to-face conversation) 55, 65, 135–36, 154, 170, 177, 184–85, 188, 204, 212, 279, 280–81, 295, 317, 488, 489n107
orality 8–9, 20, 55, 177, 317, 485; *see also* performance; reading; recitation
oration, letter and 3, 11, 138, 150, 158, 161n83, 184, 245n88, 250, 258n18, 337n11, 403, 405, 478; *see also* declamation; homily
original 2, 41–43, 201, 205, 208, 212, 221, 315, 374, 399, 477

ostracon *see* potsherd
Otto I, emperor 221
Otto II, emperor 221
Otto III, emperor 94
Ottoman Empire/Ottomans 12, 48, 162–65, 167–68, 206–07, 213, 222, 302
Ovid 45, 54

Pachomios 52
paideia *see* learning
Palestine 14, 51n62, 68n2, 83n81
papal letter 200–01
paper 2, 203, 210, 477
papyrus 2, 7, 42–43, 46, 52, 53, 70, 205, 210, 335, 343, 477
paraphrase 255, 408
parchment 2, 70n9, 203, 206, 209, 220, 221, 315–16, 388, 477
parody 40, 192
Paston collection 111–12
pastoral letter 46, 51, 52, 92–99, 105, 114; *see also* advice
patriarchal letter 7, 201–04
patristic literature *see* Church Fathers
patronage 19, 92, 100, 105, 112, 130, 133, 154, 159, 264, 287–96, 302, 322–23, 326, 354, 359, 368, 443, 447–49, 452–54, 462; *see also* asymmetrical relationship; inequality
Patmos 201
Paul/Pauline Epistles 4, 46–49, 57n80, 61–65, 228–29, 235, 237, 238, 250, 337–39
Paulinus of Nola 45, 52
Pausanias (Spartan commander) 35
Pechenegs 216
Peloponnese 151n19, 160
Pentapolis 356
performance 19–20, 149, 150, 313, 317, 318–23, 333, 353–68, 393, 400, 405, 474; *see also* orality; reading; recitation
Persian Empire/Persians 35, 72–73, 74, 215n56, 320, 384–87, 404n5, 405–06
Persian language 68n3, 71n16, 78n50
person (grammatical)
  first 62, 138, 328, 335, 336, 339, 340, 345, 400, 403, 418
  second 62, 328, 392, 400
  third 138, 361n37, 383, 387, 392, 403
persona 18, 113–14, 261–62, 301, 333, 341, 342, 345, 346; *see also* self-representation
Peter, apostle 48, 50n59, 64
Peter of Blois 103, 106–109, 112–15
Peter of Celle 99–101, 105, 115
Peter Damian 95–96, 114
Peter the Venerable 99–101, 114, 115
petition 7, 43, 70n9, 321–23, 374; *see also* request
Petrarch 112
Phaedra 34
Phalaris 10, 36, 178–79, 337, 486
Pharas (Herulian commander) 405
Pherecydes of Syros 37
Philadelphia 50
Philip II, king of France 92
Philippi 50
philosophical letter 3, 37–38, 44–45, 47, 55, 256–72; *see also* advice; didactic letter; instruction
Philostratos of Lemnos 37n11, 40, 54, 178, 337, 486
Philotheos Kokkinos, patriarch 161, 166
Philoxenus of Mabbug 73–74
Phlegon of Tralles 40–41
Photios, patriarch 10, 179, 193–94, 242–43, 244, 250, 260, 338–39, 486–89
Pico delle Mirandola 112
Pinytos of Knossos 50–51
Piroska *see* Eirene
Pisistratus 37
Pittacus of Mytilene 37
Pius II, pope *see* Enea Silvio Piccolomini
Plato 158, 166, 260, 263, 345, 358n28, 367
  letters of/attributed to 3, 36, 38, 60n91, 260, 337, 490n112
playfulness 9, 40, 125, 137, 142, 143, 155–56, 189, 314, 325, 328–29, 340–41, 344, 346n50, 368; *see also* humor; irony; riddle
Pliny the Elder 45
Pliny the Younger 44, 54, 93n7, 109, 112, 481
Plutarch 37n11, 38, 343n42
poem/poetry 5n22, 72, 92n3, 95, 102, 108, 109–10, 334, 358, 377, 392, 398–99, 416–17, 476; *see also* verse letter
Poland 212
polemical letter 49, 51, 81
Polycarp of Smyrna 49, 50, 64

Polycrates of Ephesus 51
Pompey 44
pope of Rome, letter addressed to the 92, 100, 104, 202, 205–07, 210, 216, 217
Porikologos 475
Porphyry 38, 79
Portugal 207
postal system 53, 309
postscript 2, 61–64; *see also* closing
potsherd 7, 42, 52, 68n2
praise *see* encomiastic letter
prayer 60, 63, 96, 107, 189
preface *see* letter-collection
prescript 2, 59–64; *see also* opening
presence 8, 55, 63, 97, 136, 264, 281, 291, 298, 347–48, 365–66, 399
private letter 2–4, 33, 35, 41–46, 49n58, 52n65, 53, 55, 61, 70, 108, 111, 156, 170, 202, 203, 319, 322, 334–36, 404, 412, 413–15, 421, 479
procuratorium 208
progymnasmata 39, 231, 364, 416–17n66
Proklos *see* Pseudo-Proklos
Prokopios of Caesarea 405
Prokopios of Gaza 41, 344, 486
prokypsis 398
prologue 49–50, 104, 187–88, 211, 242, 243; *see also* opening
promulgatio 201
prooimion 211, 236; *see also* prologue
Propertius 45
prose rhythm *see* rhythm
proskynema 60, 63
prosopography 17, 126, 142, 442
proverb 9, 178, 190, 240, 284, 295, 300
Psalm 78n48, 137, 187, 249
pseudepigraphal letter/pseudepigraphy 35–41, 45, 47–50, 178, 180, 260, 481, 486
Pseudo-Callisthenes *see Alexander Romance*
Pseudo-Demetrios (author of *Epistolary Types*) 8n36, 9n42–43, 56, 150–51, 178, 284–85, 486
Pseudo-Gregory of Corinth (author of *On the Four Parts of the Perfect Speech*) 10, 127, 177n1
Pseudo-Libanios/Pseudo-Proklos (author of *Epistolary Styles*) 7–8, 9n42, 9–10n44, 56–57, 150–51, 178, 228, 341, 345n48, 486
Ptolemy (Gnostic) 49
Ptolemy, Claudius 265
publication 3, 4, 33, 41, 43–45, 51–52, 70, 295, 302, 359–60, 410, 474, 477, 479–80, 485; *see also* edition; letter-collection; revision
Pythagoras/Pythagoreans 36, 141, 194, 346n50

question-and-answer *see erotapokriseis*
Quintilian 45
quotation 9, 18, 96, 98, 99, 151n19, 188–93, 233, 241, 244, 246, 247, 249; *see also* allusion

Rabanus Maurus 93
Ratherius of Verona 93
reader/readership 33, 39–40, 49, 92, 104, 109, 114, 169, 183n26, 184, 187, 193, 234, 250, 317n76, 334, 335, 337, 365, 383, 392, 410–11, 413, 482n68, 488; *see also* audience
reading 9, 70, 137, 313–18, 320, 380n19, 382, 388, 400, 421, 482–83, 486, 491
  aloud/public 4, 179–80, 182, 326, 342, 376, 393, 396, 415, 416; *see also* performance; recitation
rebuke *see* reproach
reciprocity 8, 136, 287
recitation (from memory) 180, 419–20, 478–79; *see also* reading; performance
recommendation, letter of 5n22, 44, 56–57, 92, 132, 150, 153, 161, 263, 287, 289, 293–94, 309, 311, 335, 437
reed pen 52
Register of the Patriarchate of Constantinople 204
rejection of letter 382
Renaissance *see* humanism; Latin letters
representation *see* image; presence; self-representation
reproach 50, 57, 107, 156, 157, 159, 165, 280, 325, 327–28

request 57, 61, 64, 94, 100, 130, 131–32, 134, 135, 139, 150, 153, 156, 157, 158, 161, 235, 263, 287–90, 293, 312, 321–23, 325, 326, 328; *see also* petition
Revelation, Book of 49–50
revision 2–3, 100, 104n54, 105, 106, 107n69, 114, 116, 127, 146, 168–69, 183–84, 214, 263, 308, 409, 410–11, 436, 474, 480, 485, 488, 492
rhythm 18, 73, 141, 181, 360, 363
riddle 9, 142, 178, 312, 368; *see also* playfulness
ritual 18, 19, 220, 283, 289, 294, 299, 307–29, 359n31, 367, 398, 400, 415
Robert II, count of Flanders 219
Robert II, king of France 95
Roger II, king of Sicily 106
roll *see* scroll
rolled/rolling up of letter 53, 61, 315, 374–76, 378, 384, 387–88; *see also* folded/folding of letter
romance *see* novel
Romanos I Lakapenos, emperor 220
Romanos IV Diogenes, emperor 129, 130
Rome 47, 50–51, 58–59, 95, 310; *see also* pope of Rome
Roxanne (*Alexander Romance*) 384–87, 388, 398
royal letter 111, 200–01
Rus of Kiev 212, 216

sacra 7, 71, 211
  iussio 203
Saint Denis, Letter of 205, 209, 210, 212
Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī 217
Sallust 45
salutation 1, 49, 64, 78, 104, 109, 110, 153, 189, 191, 201, 211, 235, 405, 416, 420, 421–22; *see also* address; greeting; valediction
salutem 61
Salvian of Marseilles 52
sample letter 22, 56–57, 70–71, 98, 102–03, 105, 111, 127, 150–51, 178, 284, 339, 487; *see also* letter-writing manual; model
sanctio 212
sarcasm *see* irony
Sardinia 216
science 5n22, 11, 78–79, 94, 138, 242, 266; *see also* astronomy; mathematics
scribe 2, 52–53, 116, 169, 183, 211, 214, 218, 384, 388, 400, 480, 488; *see also* secretary
Scripture *see* Bible
scroll 2, 7, 315, 374–76, 378, 384–90, 392–94, 396
seal 53, 201, 216, 220, 314, 315, 341, 347, 377n10
secrecy *see* confidentiality
secretary 43n34, 52–53, 98, 99, 100, 114, 128, 140, 215, 317, 320, 384, 388, 407; *see also* scribe
self/selfhood 17, 126, 150, 250, 333–48
self-representation 51–52, 113, 116, 138–40, 147, 169–71, 229, 246, 247, 262, 264, 271, 308, 323, 491; *see also* persona; self/selfhood
Seljuks/Seljuk sultanate 215, 217–18, 220, 221, 320
Semitic letters 47, 62–64; *see also* Syriac letters
Seneca 44, 48, 52, 54, 93, 94, 109, 112, 259n28, 264n61, 340n24
Seven Sages 36, 37
shalom 62, 64
shlām 78
signature 1, 53, 61, 133, 207, 209–11, 376
separation 8, 33, 42, 55, 65, 136, 138, 154–55, 177, 184–85, 188, 228, 229, 238, 251, 269, 279–81, 298, 300, 335, 419, 478; *see also* absence
Serbia/Serbs 212, 216, 378, 382, 410
Severos of Antioch 73n25, 74n29, 485
Severus Sebokht 78–79
Shahdost of Tirhan 83
Shubalemaran of Seleucia 83
Sicily 35, 38, 377
  Norman kingdom/Normans of 100, 215, 218, 221–22
Sidonius Apollinaris 93
Siena 206
silence 136, 155–56, 188, 194, 267–68, 280, 289, 297–99, 309, 327
Simon Peter *see* Peter
Sinai, Mount 70, 74, 83n81
Smyrna 50
social capital *see* capital
social network *see* network
social status *see* status

Socrates 36, 345n48, 364
Sogdian language 68n3
Solon 37
Song of Songs 345n47
Sophronios of Jerusalem 69n7
sorrow *see* mourning
Soter of Rome 51
South Arabia 74–75, 216
Spain 41, 47, 94, 207, 213, 219, 220
Sparta 151n19
Spartans 193, 194
speech *see* declamation; homily; oration
Statius 45
status, social 9, 18, 57, 114, 128, 130, 140, 142, 150, 153, 210–11, 229, 243, 244, 248, 251, 288, 296–97, 299, 324–27, 328, 360, 361–62, 447
Stefan Uroš II Milutin, king of Serbia 204n16
Stefan Uroš III Nemanjić, king of Serbia 410
Stephen III, king of Hungary 407
Stephen of Nicomedia 280–81, 289
Stephen of Orléans 93
Stonor collection 111–112
stylus 52
Suda 343
Süleyman the Magnificent 222
Sylvester II, pope *see* Gerbert of Aurillac
symbolic capital *see* capital
Symeon I, tsar of Bulgaria 202, 244
Symeon Magistros 297–98n51, 315, 317–18, 319, 327, 486
Symeon Metaphrastes 333
Symeon of Thessaloniki 247
Symmachus 45
symmetrical relationship 153, 296–97, 324; *see also* equality; friendship
Synesios 10, 13, 14n65, 41, 127, 178, 193–94, 261, 263, 337n12, 341n33, 342n39, 343–44, 346, 356, 478, 485–86
synodal/synodical letter 7, 13, 51
Syria 14, 68–84, 216, 219, 408, 431
Syriac
  language 7, 68–69, 70, 81, 83n81
  letters 7, 69–84
  sources 219
  translation 76–77, 78n50, 79; *see also* translation of Greek letter
teacher-student relationship 130–31, 228, 229, 251, 324, 438–39
Tegernsee collection 102–03
terminology (of letter) 6–7, 71, 137, 200–01, 203–04, 208, 374n2; *see also* letter-collection
testament, spiritual 52
Thales 37
thanks/thanksgiving 2, 57, 63, 100, 132, 182, 312, 326
theatron 20, 148–49, 319, 320, 353–68
Themistocles 35, 36, 38
Theocritus of Chios 343n42
Theodora, empress 380
Theodora Rhaoulaina 181–82, 302
Theodore I Palaiologos, Despot of Morea 160, 164
Theodore II Laskaris, emperor 262–63, 340n28, 482, 484–85n83
Theodore of Cyzicus 180–81, 188, 327, 484n83, 486
Theodore Daphnopates 310–11, 321, 347, 486
Theodore Hyrtakenos 262, 476n40
Theodore Metochites 192, 204n16, 365–67
Theodore Patrikios 17
Theodore Prodromos 258, 300, 313–14n49, 344, 347, 414–15, 416, 422
Theodore Stoudites 13, 21, 185–86, 339, 346, 357, 482n69
Theodoret of Cyrus 431, 486
Theodosios I, emperor 12, 488
Theognis 151n19
theological letter/theology 13, 46–51, 74, 81, 94–96, 101, 114, 149–50, 165–67, 234–39, 263, 337–38, 485, 487–89; *see also* advice; exegesis; instruction; pastoral letter
Theophanes Homologetes 215
Theophanes of Nicaea 228, 237–38
Theophilos, emperor 380–81
Theophrastus 37
Theophylact of Ohrid 19, 236–37, 296, 310, 319–20, 324, 326–27, 431–32, 437n32, 440–60
Theophylact Simokattes 3, 40, 192, 215, 227n3, 337n12, 406, 486
Thessaloniki 147, 149, 158, 162–63, 167–68, 247, 339n22, 359, 413

Thomas Aquinas 148, 166
Thomas Becket 105, 115
Thomas Magistros 365
Thucydides 35, 149, 403
Timagenes of Miletus 41n24
Timothy I 76–77
topos 106, 271, 279, 281, 283, 287, 292–93, 298–99, 324, 339, 344–45, 384, 391, 399–400, 482n66; *see also* epistolary motif
tragedy *see* drama
Trajan 44
Tralles 50
transmission 1–2, 4n20, 13, 34, 41–43, 69n5, 84, 127, 168, 201, 204, 205–07, 212–21, 263n52, 341–42, 467–70, 477–93; *see also* archive; letter-collection; original; publication
translation of Greek letter
  Arabic 217, 220
  Coptic 49n55
  Ethiopian 49n55
  Latin 50n61, 64, 206, 208, 216–17, 218–19
  modern 16–17
  Syriac 69, 72n20, 73n25
travel 22, 184, 310, 346
treatise 5n22, 100, 148, 171, 231–32, 239, 255, 263, 487
  in letter form 11, 13, 38, 43–45, 49, 50, 51, 55, 74, 95–96, 108, 110, 112, 236, 242, 249, 256–60, 271, 343n42, 489
Trebizond 377, 383, 384n30
Turkic/Turkish language 68n3, 213, 421
Turks 212, 216; *see also* Muslims; Ottoman Empire; Seljuks

Umayyadd caliphate/Umayyadds 80, 219
unfolding of letter 314–17, 360; *see also* unrolling of letter
union (of souls)/unity 8, 97, 138, 264, 269, 345–46
unrolling of letter 313–18, 387, 388, 393, 398; *see also* unfolding of letter
Urban VI, pope 162
Utigur Huns 405

vale 61
valediction 2, 49, 53, 61–64, 328, 405, 413–14, 416; *see also* closing; postscript; salutation
Valentinus (Gnostic) 49
variatio 191
varietas 108, 110
Varro 44, 45
Vasily *see* Basil
Vatican *Epithalamion* 377, 391–400
Venetians/Venice 11n54, 147, 155, 156, 164, 205, 216, 217, 218, 221, 247
Venice Alexander Romance 383–91, 398–400
vernacular *see* English; French; German; Greek
verse letter 5, 14, 45, 414–23
Vindolanda tablets 46
Virgin 80, 375n4
Vladimir of Kiev 382
voice 9, 185, 186, 228, 250, 316, 338, 354, 360–63, 366n57, 368, 392–93, 400, 417, 419

Wales 109–10, 115
wax
  as writing support 52
  seal 201
Wibald of Stablo 103–04, 113
William I, king of England 96
William I, king of Sicily 407
William of Aebelholt 92–93, 115
wood (as writing support) 7, 46, 52, 477
women, letters of 4, 34, 36, 42, 43, 46, 101–03, 104–05, 111, 181–82, 301–02, 384–91, 414, 415–23, 481
writing material *see* paper; papyrus; parchment; potsherd; reed pen; stylus; wax; wood

Xenophon 35
Xenophon of Ephesus 40, 416

Zealots 147n3, 158
Zeno of Citium 37
Zeno of Kaunos 53
Zoe, empress 375–76

Index of Greek Terms

ἀγάπη 292
ἀγαπητοί 238
ἄδεια 325
ἀδελφοί 238
ἄλλος ἑαυτός 346
ἀνακάθαρσις 480
ἀνάπτυξις 315
ἀναπτύσσω 316
ἀναφορά 7, 11n54
ἀνέκδοτοι 479
ἀνευχαριστικός 57
ἀντίγραμμα 7
ἀντιγραφή 137n57
ἀντίγραφον 7
ἀντιπίττακον 420n76
ἀξιόω 328
ἀξίωσις 132
ἀπαγγέλλω 310n24
ἀπελύθη 209, 215
ἀποκρίσεις 488
ἀποστολικός *see* χαρακτήρ
ἀρχέτυπα 10
αὐτόγραφος 341n33
ἀφήγησις 483n74

βασιλικόν 203
βιβλία 482
βιβλίον 7, 409
βίβλος 488
βυβλίον 7

γνωριμότης 326, 327
γράμμα 6, 137n57, 203–04
γράμματα 6–7, 420n76
γραμματηφόρος 6, 362
γραμμάτιον 6, 408, 409
γραμματοεισαγωγεύς 322, 361, 362
γραμματοφόρος 6
γραφή 6, 203, 341n34, 420n76, 421n83
γράφω 6

δελτάριον 408
δελτίον 7
δέλτος 7
δέομαι 328
διδασκαλική ἐπιστολή 228
διηγέομαι 310n24
διήγησις 483n74
δοκεῖν 341

ἐγκύκλιον/ἐγκύκλιος 7, 71n16
ἔδικτον 209
εἶδος 137
εἰρήνη 62, 64
ἐκδίδωμι 479
ἔμψυχος 364
ἔνταλμα 203
ἐπιγεγραμμένον 314
ἐπίγραμμα 314
ἐπιγραφή 314
ἐπισταλτικός 6
ἐπιστέλλω 6
ἐπιστολαί 481, 482, 488
ἐπιστολή 5, 6–7, 11, 137, 408, 420n76, 478, 481
ἐπιστολιαφόρος 6
ἐπιστολίδιον 6
ἐπιστολικός 6
ἐπιστολιμαῖος 6; *see also* λόγος ἐπιστολιμαῖος
ἐπιστόλιον 6
ἐπιστολογράφος 6
ἐπιτιμητικός 57
ἐρρῶσθαι 59, 61
ἔρρωσθε 61
ἔρρωσο 2, 61
ἐρωταποκρίσεις *see* General Index: *erotapokriseis*
εὐθυμεῖν 60
εὖ πράσσειν 60
εὐτύχει 61
εὐψυχεῖν 60

ἦθος 292, 363; *see also* General Index: ethos/*ethos*

θάρσος 325, 327
θέατρον *see* λογικὸν θέατρον; General Index: *theatron*

ἰδιόχειρον 341n33
ἰδιωτικὰ θέατρα 355

ἰδιωτικόν 340
ἰσόψυχος 135

καταλόγια 418
κατάλογος 483n74
κέλευσις 203, 216
κεφάλαια 234, 237, 489
κῆρυξ 360
κομιστής 362
κύκλος 358
κῦρ 296

λακωνίζειν 193, 409
λογικὸν θέατρον 319, 354, 360; *see also* General Index: *theatron*
λόγιος 139, 323–24
λόγοι, οἱ 139
λόγος 5n22
  ἐπιστολιμαῖος 5n22, 11, 161n83
  προφορικός 405
  χρυσόβουλλος 5n22, 203, 209

μέλος 360
μεμπτικός 57
μεσιτεία 131
μεταγράφειν 480
μηνολόγημα 209, 210
μολύβδιον 7

νεαρά 203, 209
νόμος (ὁ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν) 137–38
νουθετητικός 57

οἰκειότης 326
οἰκείωσις 132, 326, 327
ὀνειδιστικός 57
ὄστρακον 7
οὗτος 311
ὀχληρός 325, 327

παιδιά 344
παραίνεσις 228
παραμυθητικός 57
παρρησία 325, 327
πίναξ 7
πιττάκι(ον) 7, 203, 419, 420n76
πληθυνθείη 64
πόνημα 482
πονοαντιπίττακον 420n76
πρᾶγμα 11
πρόγραμμα 240
προσκύνημα 60
πρόσταγμα 203, 209, 421n83, 422
προσφθέγγομαι 317

σάκρα 7, 71, 203
σιγίλλιον 209
σιγιλλιῶδες γράμμα 204
συγγράμματα 11
συγγραφή 137
συγκατάβασις 327
συλλαβαί 7
συλλαβή 7
συλλέγω 481
συλλογή 481
σύλλογος 358
συνάγω 481
συναγωγή 481
συνοδικὴ διάγνωσις 203
σύνταγμα 489
συντεταγμένον 482
συστατικός 57
σφραγῖδα λῦσαι 315
σχεδία 480
σώζεσθε 64

τιμιωτάτῳ 59
τίτλος 314
τόμος 7, 71n16
τραγῳδός 363
τρόποι 363

ὑγιαίνειν 59–60
υἱέ 248
ὑπόμνημα 60

φαίνεσθαι 341
φθέγγομαι 317
φθόγγος 360
φιλία 132, 135–137, 279, 281n3, 282, 286–87, 296, 326; *see also* General Index: friendship
φιλικός 282, 284
φίλοι 282
φιλολογία 466
φιλόλογος 466

φίλος 291
φιλοσοφία 139–40
φιλόσοφος 139–40
φιλοφρόνησις 55
φιλτάτῳ 59
φορτικός 310, 325–26, 328

χαῖρε 60, 78
χαίρειν 2, 11, 59–60, 62, 78
χαίρετε 78
χαίροις 60
χαρακτήρ 342n35
  ἀποστολικός 338
χάρις 62, 64, 325
χάρτης 7, 320, 408
χαρτί(ν) 7, 419
χαρτίον 7
χαρτίτσι 7, 419
χορός 358
χρεία 9
χρυσόβουλλος *see* λόγος χρυσόβουλλος

ψεκτικός 57

ὡς ἀπό 192, 287n20, 333, 340–41; *see also* General Index: letter written on someone else's behalf

Index of Manuscripts

Athos, Megiste Lavra
Laur. Ω 126 486

Baghdad, Chaldean Monastery
cod. 509 76n39

Birmingham, University of Birmingham
Ming. syr. 16 71n12
Ming. syr. 75 70n11

Escorial, Real Biblioteca
Z. IV. 5 337n12

Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana
Laur. Plut. 55.6 486n88
Laur. Plut. 57.7 337n11
Laur. Plut. 57.40 127
Laur. Plut. 59.35 482, 484–85n81

London, British Library
Add. 12139 71n13
Add. 12154 81n69, 81n71, 82n72–73
Add. 12172 80n60, 80n62
Add. 14654 72n20
Add. 17156 78n52
Add. 17182 73n23
Add. 36749 342
Burney 75 168

Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España
Vitr. 26–2 376–83

Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana
B 4 sup. 337n12, 486

Oxford, Bodleian Library
Barocci 25 178
Barocci 50 337n12
Barocci 131 258

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France
Par. Coisl. 223 341n33
Par. Coisl. 368 486n88
Par. gr. 506 486n88
Par. gr. 1182 127, 137
Par. gr. 1209 476n40
Par. gr. 2022 183–84
Par. syr. 248 71n12, 71n15
Par. syr. 346 79n53

Patmos, Monastery of St. John the Theologian
Patm. 706 486

Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana
Vat. gr. 85 486n88
Vat. gr. 101 168–69, 480
Vat. gr. 116 263
Vat. gr. 676 239–40n58, 342
Vat. gr. 712 137
Vat. gr. 1085 263
Vat. gr. 1086 263
Vat. gr. 1851 391–98
Vat. gr. 1898 263
Vat. Urb. gr. 133 168–69, 480
Vat. syr. 158 71

Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana
Marc. gr. Z. 512 337n12

Venice, Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini
cod. 5 383–91

Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
Vind. hist. gr. 47 204
Vind. hist. gr. 48 204
Vind. phil. gr. 342 337n12
Vind. theol. gr. 168 487

Index of Papyri

P.Amh. II 131 52n65
P.Amh. II 132 52n65
P.Berol. 8285 70n9
P.Bon. 5 57–58
P.Euphrates 3–4 70n9
P.Lond. I 42 56n76
P.Lond. VI 1912 43
P.Mert. II 62 57n80
P.Mich. VIII 490 52n65, 58
P.Mich. VIII 491 52n65, 58–61
P.Oxy. I 115 57n80
P.Oxy. II 292 57n80
P.Oxy. IV 746 57n80
P.Paris 47 56n77
P.Paris 63 57